

OFFICIAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The 17th Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities (ACAH2026)

May 09-13, 2026 | Tokyo, Japan, and Online

ISSN: 2186-229X

Organised by the International Academic Forum (IAFOR) in partnership with the IAFOR Research Centre at the Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP) at The University of Osaka, Japan, and IAFOR's Global Partners.

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026

Official Conference Proceedings

ISSN: 2186-229X

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Date Published: July 27, 2026

Published by The International Academic Forum on the IAFOR Research Archive
URL: https://papers.iafor.org/

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The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)
Sakae 1-16-26 2F
Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi
Japan 460-0008
iafor.org

Table of Contents

A Study on the Effects of Game-Based Learning in Learning and Reviewing English Grammar and Student Satisfaction
Sutheerawan Suwannatrai
Suricha Thanwisai pp. 1 - 11

Naming Places, Narrating Selves: A Study of Locative Thai Film Titles and the Meaning of Spatial Identity in Contemporary Thai Films
Supamonta Supanan pp. 13 - 24

The State Archives Reform in Portugal and the Societal Approach
Jorge Janeiro pp. 25 - 35

Dialogues on Dharma: Perspectives on *Bhagavad Gita* and *Shanti Parva*
Anusha Hegde pp. 37 - 46

Water as a Landscape Element in Historic Garden: The Comparison of Mughal Garden and Japanese Garden
Onumpai Samkhuntod pp. 47 - 60

Comments as Part of the Dissemination of Disinformation Discourse
Simona Fraštíková pp. 61 - 84

Communication of Local Development Policy by Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality
Wittayatorn Tokeaw pp. 85 - 95

Reimagining Junks in Taiwanese Art: Transcultural Translation and Virtual Interpretation of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's Paintings
Chao Jung Chen pp. 97 - 104

Developing a Conceptual Framework of Threadvertising Branding: The Case of *Peg O' My Heart* (2025)
Ka Yan Chung pp. 105 - 120

From Marks to Meaning: A Mixed-Methods Study on Visual Journals in Technique-Driven Art Courses
Raymond Charles Nigel E. Ador Dionisio pp. 121 - 136

Generative AI in STEM Projects to Develop Analytical Thinking and Problem-Solving
Thaweesin Amnuaiphanwilai
Wanchalearm Junsong pp. 137 - 144

Gaza Verse* to Rehumanize the Dehumanized: Poetics of Palestinian Resistance in the *Gaza Verse
Parami Ranasinghe pp. 145 - 155

User Experience of Virtual Reality in Lieyu Bunker Tours: Case Studies of Jiangjun Bunker and Shaxi Tunnel
Han-Yu Yu
Kuan-Hsuan Chen
Chun-Di Chen pp. 157 - 169

The Activist Girl Shaped by Western Colonialism: Gloriosa in Scholastique Mukasonga's *Notre-Dame du Nil*
Yuto Nakagawa pp. 171 - 177

Apocryphal Assumptions About Artistry and Artificial Intelligence: A Case Analysis of *Andersen v. Stability AI Ltd.*
Lin Allen
Shea-Tinn Yeh pp. 179 - 184

Play for Peace? South Korea's Esports Ecosystem as a Digital Soft Power Instrument for Promoting Global Citizenship
Nur Izzah Anisah binti Ismail pp. 185 - 194

Addressing the Malaysian Doctor Brain Drain Phenomenon: Analysis of Singapore Recruitment Issues and Proposed Solutions
Nur Yaqin Zaheen Binti Mohd Razali pp. 195 - 203

Thich Nhat Hanh's Concept of Practice: Its Origins, Meaning, and Function in Engaged Buddhism and Buddhist-Christian Dialogue
Norimasa Fujimoto pp. 205 - 213

Integrating Virtual Production and MetaHuman Creator Into University Curriculum
Lana Dujmović
Ana Perišić pp. 215 - 226

Navigating Timbre: Locomotion as Epistemic Practice in Immersive Acoustic Environments
Huoston Rodrigues Batista pp. 227 - 241

Cloth as Political Language: How Textile Arts Became Instruments of Ideology, Identity, and State Power
Manikya Sai Tejaswini Vallabhajosyula
Lasya Aji Silpa
Barbara Trippeer pp. 243 - 259

Metaphors in Impolite Portrayal of Women Online: The Case of Indonesia's Cyber-Sexism
Dhanisa Kamila M. Huda pp. 261 - 273

Advocating Virtual-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning: Designing Educational Games to Facilitate Learning Motivation in Hong Kong Primary English
Law Tsun Hin pp. 275 - 301

Counterfactual Imaginations, Symbolism, and Poetic Language as Part of Populist and Manipulative Rhetoric
Ján Demčišák pp. 303 - 317

Construction of Hsinchu Shrine in the Japanese Colonial Period: Focusing on the Matsushima Family
Chang-Wei Li
Chia-Yi Chang pp. 319 - 324

Visual Design of Emotion Cards: Content Validation of Emotion Colors and Facial Expressions
Elena Carolina Li
Hsiao-Yu Lin
Tzu-Yu Chen pp. 325 - 342

***No Reason to Stay in the Real World Any Longer* Anime Series and Spirituality in Post-Aum Japan**
Giovanni Stigliano Messuti pp. 343 - 351

Graphic Design in Architectural Education: A Pedagogical Model and SWOT Analysis
Marie Bajnarová pp. 353 - 363

Adapting Personal Development and Growth: Opportunities and Challenges of COVID-19 Psychosocial and Educational Developmental Influences and Conceptual Frameworks
Law Tsun Hin pp. 365 - 393

Embodied Cycles: Procedural Reincarnation and Existential Narrative in Immersive VR
Wen-Hui Bai
Tsun-Hung Tsai pp. 395 - 404

Balancing Structural Bonding and Surface Aesthetics: A Case Study on the Platinum Print *Porcelain Nude 2017(10)*
Ya-Yun Hsiao
Shih-Chiang Cheng
I-Cheng Li pp. 405 - 416

***Rising Above the Waters*: Narrative Inquiry Into the Rewriting of Family Legacies by Filipino Adults Triumphant Over Intergenerational Poverty**
Rodjan Sibal
pp. 417 - 426

From Student Mobility to Human Capital Pathways: Reframing Asia–U.S. Educational Collaboration in an Era of Workforce Transformation
Junko Ishikawa pp. 427 - 434

Who Is a Teacher?
Fatma James pp. 435 - 444

***The Elephant Vanishes*, *TV People*, and Identity in Modern Japan**
Loren Landucci pp. 445 - 451

Persistence of Form: Operational Memory and Material Continuity
Olga Cuxart Oriol pp. 453 - 460

Material Culture and Marginality: The Loss of Mataram Characteristics in Ancient Gravestones at Tanggeran Village, Central Java (19th–20th Centuries)
Muthia Zahri
Isman Pratama Nasution
Adhi Agus Oktaviana pp. 461 - 471

Descriptive Mundanities and Scale in the Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*
Sanchita Sahoo pp. 473 - 478

Navigating Cities Through Play: A Study of Geo AR Induced Urban Flânerie During the Pikmin Bloom Tour in Kaohsiung
Yu Jou Lin
Nai Yuan Pai pp. 479 - 489

Social Media and Youth Audience Participation Motivation in Performance Events: A Case Study of a Central Taiwan Performance Venue
Yu-Jing Hsiao
Yueh-Tuan Li pp. 491 - 503

From Embodied Perception to Spatial Construction: Design and Practice of an Open-Source Spatial Education Curriculum at Taichung Green Museumbrary
Weiting Lin
Yichen Lee
Hsinju Hsieh pp. 505 - 516

From Two Kinds of Fear in Communication to Transformative Intercultural Communication for Creative Democracy
Jiwon Kim pp. 517 - 523

A Study on the Effects of Game-Based Learning in Learning and Reviewing English Grammar and Student Satisfaction

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This classroom research aimed to: (1) compare English grammar achievement before and after instruction using game-based learning, (2) compare English grammar achievement between male and female students after game-based learning, and (3) examine students' satisfaction with game-based learning activities. The sample comprised 63 Grade 11 students at Surawiwat School, Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand, selected through cluster sampling. The study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design. Data were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests for pre-/post comparisons, independent-samples t-tests for male-female comparisons, and descriptive statistics for satisfaction. Results showed that post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores at the .05 level ($t(62) = 8.512$, $p = .000$). Male students scored significantly lower than female students in some lessons at the .05 level. Overall student satisfaction with the approach was high ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.68$). The findings indicate that game-based learning can improve English grammar achievement while increasing enjoyment and reducing boredom in grammar review.

Keywords: game-based learning, English grammar, student satisfaction, secondary education

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Introduction

English is an essential skill in the contemporary world because it plays an important role in education, employment, and participation in a globally interconnected society. Although English has long been introduced in Thai education from early levels onward, English language teaching in Thailand still faces persistent challenges, particularly in the development of learners' language skills. In the researcher's experience as a classroom teacher, one important difficulty is that students often struggle to develop listening and speaking skills because of shyness, low confidence, limited motivation to participate in classroom activities, and incomplete understanding of English grammar, which differs substantially in structure from Thai.

Grammar remains a fundamental basis for using language accurately and appropriately in different contexts. Students need sufficient grammatical understanding in order to strengthen other language skills such as writing, reading, and communication. However, grammar instruction is often delivered through traditional explanation and memorization. Such approaches may not adequately stimulate students' interest or sustain their motivation. Many students do not review lessons independently, rarely seek additional knowledge on their own, and depend heavily on repeated teacher guidance or peer support.

For this reason, the researcher saw the need to improve instructional practice and create a learning atmosphere that better supports student motivation. The researcher therefore became interested in game-based learning as an instructional approach. Game-based learning can create enjoyment, promote participation, reduce learning tension, and provide opportunities for students to practice language while engaging in structured activities. Because students generally respond positively to age-appropriate and entertaining forms of learning, game-based learning appeared to be a promising way to support grammar review in the English classroom.

This study was conducted in a Grade 11 integrated English course and focused on three objectives. First, it examined whether students' English grammar achievement improved after game-based learning activities. Second, it compared post-test grammar achievement between male and female students after the activities. Third, it investigated students' satisfaction with game-based learning. The study sought not only to measure learning outcomes, but also to generate classroom-based evidence that could be used to refine future instructional design.

Literature Review

Game-based learning refers to an instructional approach in which learning activities are deliberately designed around games to support specific learning objectives. In practice, it is closely related to gamification because both rely on challenge, participation, feedback, and motivation to promote learner engagement. In English language teaching, game-based learning is valuable not merely because it is enjoyable, but because it can make repeated practice more meaningful and lower students' anxiety while they work with target language forms.

Thai and international scholarship has consistently suggested that game-supported learning can enhance participation and achievement. Sinthuprasit (2021) explained that gamification is important in education because it can increase learners' motivation and commitment to classroom tasks. Khamjatphai et al. (2024) argued that game-based instructional techniques can make classroom learning more attractive and can support stronger achievement outcomes. In language education, Yudintseva (2015) noted that game-enhanced second-language learning

can create repeated exposure, interaction, and a safer space for trial and error, all of which support more active learning.

Research in Thai educational settings also provides empirical support for the use of games in English instruction. Limmanee (2020), for example, found that English speaking skills improved after students learned through games and that students showed strong interest in the approach. Bamrung and Phusirit (2023) reported that game-based learning improved English-speaking skills among Grade 3 students and produced achievement levels above the expected criterion. Singlor (2022) similarly found that using vocabulary games helped students improve English vocabulary learning, with post-test scores higher than pre-test scores.

These studies suggest that game-based learning can support learning alongside enjoyment, reduce boredom, encourage practice, and help students develop concepts without feeling overwhelmed by formal instruction. Even so, the effectiveness of the approach depends on the appropriate instructional design. Games need to match the lesson objective, the linguistic difficulty of the target content, and the needs of learners. They should not be added solely for entertainment; rather, they should be clearly connected to what students are expected to understand and use.

Hongkhunthod (2023) proposed five major steps in game-based instructional design: defining learning objectives, selecting appropriate games, designing activities around those games, providing guidance and support during participation, and reviewing and improving the process after implementation. Moolthaisong (2020) further explained that games used for instruction may aim to create enjoyment, promote cooperation, support physical, emotional, and cognitive development, reduce classroom tension, and help teaching achieve course objectives. Taken together, these perspectives indicate that game-based learning requires both pedagogical understanding and careful selection of game forms.

In the present study, the researcher drew on these ideas to develop grammar review activities that were aligned with the objectives of the integrated English course. The expectation was that students would gain stronger grammatical understanding, be more willing to engage in review, and respond positively to classroom activities that were relevant to their learning level and interests.

Methodology

Research Design

This classroom research employed a one-group pretest-posttest design. The study examined the effects of game-based learning on English grammar achievement, compared post-test achievement between male and female students, and explored student satisfaction with the instructional approach.

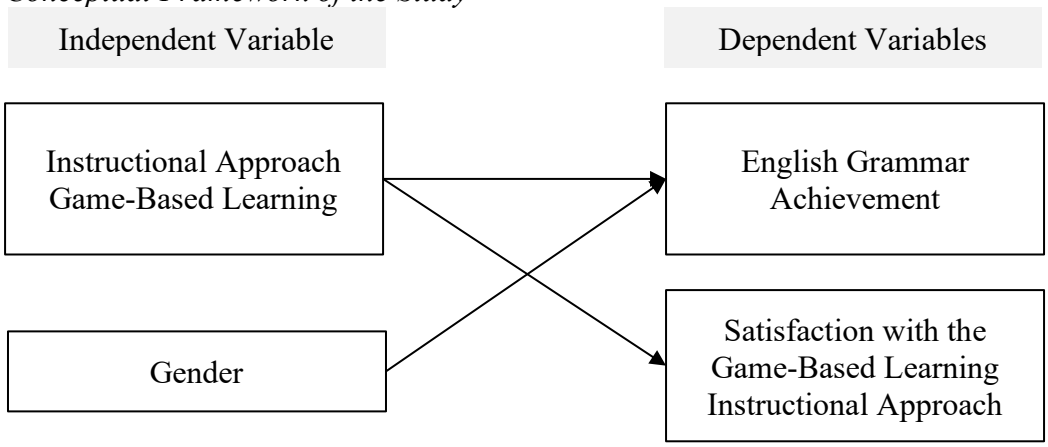
Research Hypotheses

The study was guided by two hypotheses. First, students who learned through game-based learning would show higher English grammar achievement after the intervention than before it. Second, male and female students would differ in post-test English grammar achievement after the game-based learning activities.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Note. Gender was treated as a comparison variable in relation to grammar achievement and satisfaction outcomes.

Participants

The population comprised 148 Grade 11 students at Surawiwat School, Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand. The sample was selected through cluster sampling, using classrooms as the sampling unit. Three of the five Grade 11 classrooms taught by the researcher in EN 32102 Integrated English were selected, producing a sample of 63 students.

Table 1

Participant Distribution by Classroom and Gender

Classroom	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
M.5/1	13	59.09	9	40.91	22	34.92
M.5/2	9	45.00	11	55.00	20	31.75
M.5/3	8	38.10	13	61.90	21	33.33
Total	30	47.62	33	52.38	63	100.00

Note. n = 63.

Instruments

Two research instruments were used. The first was a set of grammar achievement tests covering three lessons: Relative Clauses, Future Perfect and Future Continuous, and Future in the Past. These topics were selected from the EN 32102 Integrated English course structure in the revised upper-secondary curriculum of Surawiwat School, Suranaree University of Technology. The pre-tests and post-tests were prepared from exercises and test items adapted from the Think! Level 5 (C1) series published by Cambridge University Press. The materials are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an internationally recognized framework for language proficiency.

The second instrument was a 17-item student satisfaction questionnaire concerning game-based learning activities. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from lower to higher levels of satisfaction. Following Boonchom Srisa-ard (2013), mean scores were interpreted as follows: 4.51–5.00 = very high, 3.51–4.50 = high, 2.51–3.50 = moderate, 1.51–2.50 = low, and 1.00–1.50 = very low.

Data Collection Procedure

Before the experiment began, the researcher explained the purposes of the study and the sequence of data collection to the students. Students then completed an initial questionnaire to provide baseline information about their attitudes and expectations regarding game-based learning.

For each grammar lesson, students first completed a pre-test in order to record their initial level of understanding. The researcher then taught the target lesson and conducted a review activity designed according to the principles of game-based learning. During each activity, the researcher explained the rules of the game, observed student behavior, and recorded the results of participation. Extra points were used as a motivational element within the game structure.

After each game-based review activity, students completed a post-test for the same grammar topic. At the end of the intervention sequence, they completed the satisfaction questionnaire. The researcher then analyzed the collected data in order to determine whether game-based learning improved achievement and whether students responded positively to the instructional approach.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted in three ways. First, English grammar achievement before and after the intervention was compared by using paired-samples t-tests. Second, male and female students' post-test achievement was compared by using independent-samples t-tests. Third, student satisfaction was analyzed by using descriptive statistics, specifically mean scores and standard deviations.

Results and Discussion

Learning Achievement Before and After Game-Based Learning

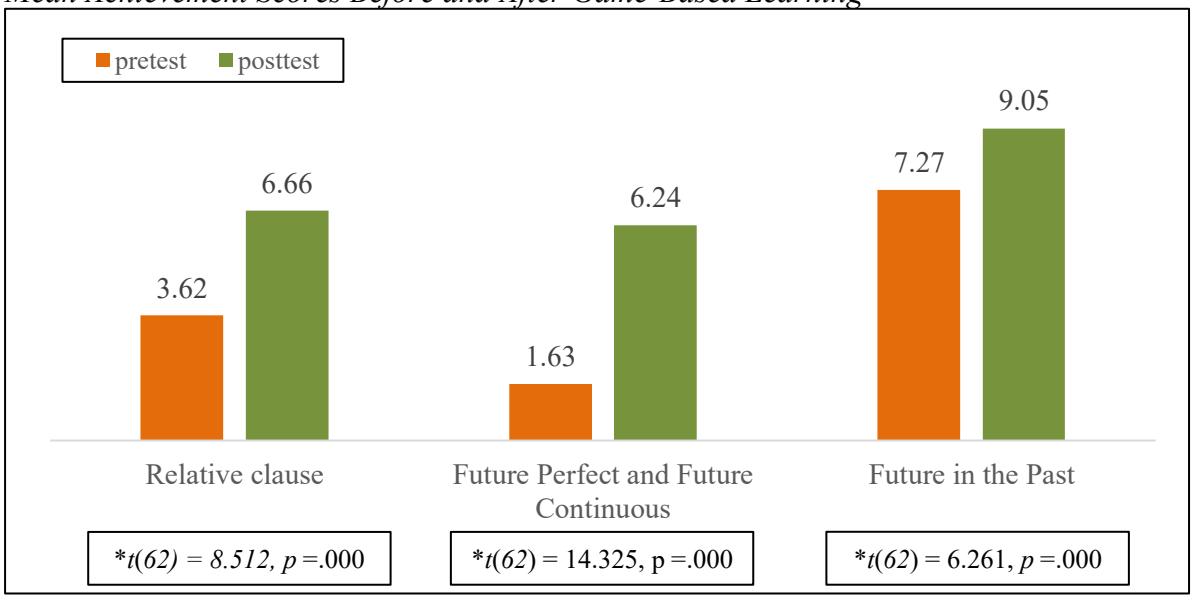
Students’ mean grammar scores increased across all three lessons following the game-based review activities, with statistically significant gains observed in each case. Specifically, for Relative Clauses, the mean score improved from 3.62 (pre-test) to 6.66 (post-test), $t(62) = 8.512$, $p = .000$. In the Future Perfect and Future Continuous lesson, the mean increased from 1.63 to 6.24, $t(62) = 14.325$, $p = .000$. Similarly, for Future in the Past, the mean rose from 7.27 to 9.05, $t(62) = 6.261$, $p = .000$. These consistent improvements indicate that the game-based learning activities contributed meaningfully to students’ grammar achievement rather than serving solely as engaging classroom tasks. The statistically significant differences at the .05 level across all lessons further support the instructional effectiveness of the intervention. These findings are summarized and illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2
Comparison of Mean Achievement Scores Before and After Game-Based Learning

Lesson	Test	M	SD	SE	t	p
Relative Clauses	Pretest	3.62	2.30	0.29	8.512*	.000
	Posttest	6.66	2.29	0.29		
Future Perfect and Future Continuous	Pretest	1.63	2.02	0.25	14.325*	.000
	Posttest	6.24	1.87	0.24		
Future in the Past	Pretest	7.27	1.87	0.24	6.261*	.000
	Posttest	9.05	1.29	0.16		

Note. n = 63. df = 62. Full score = 10 points. *p < .05.

Figure 2
Mean Achievement Scores Before and After Game-Based Learning



Note. Full score = 10 points.

Gender Differences in Post-test Achievement

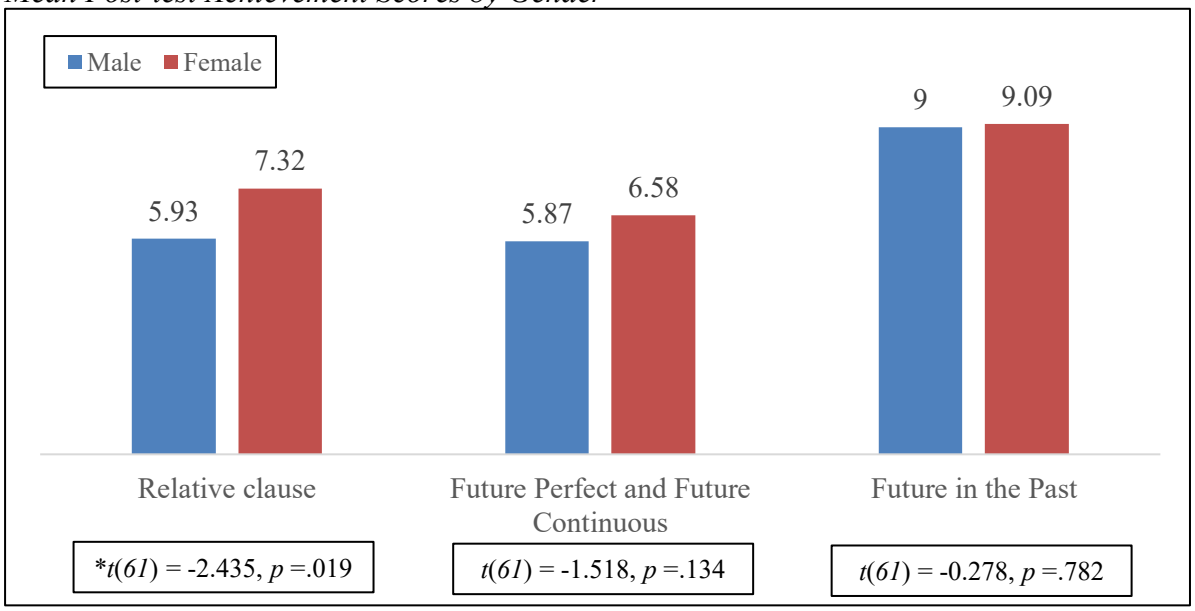
A comparison of male and female post-test scores revealed a statistically significant difference only in the Relative Clauses lesson. Female students achieved a higher mean score (M = 7.32) than male students (M = 5.93), and this difference was statistically significant, t(61) = -2.435, p = .019. In contrast, no statistically significant gender differences were found in the other two lessons. For Future Perfect and Future Continuous, female students (M = 6.58) slightly outperformed male students (M = 5.87), but the difference was not significant, t(61) = -1.518, p = .134. Similarly, in Future in the Past, the mean scores for male (M = 9.00) and female students (M = 9.09) were nearly identical, with no significant difference observed, t(61) = -0.278, p = .782. These findings suggest that gender-related differences in post-test performance were minimal overall, with a significant disparity observed only in the Relative Clauses lesson. These findings are summarized and illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 3
Comparison of Post-test Achievement by Gender

Lesson	Gender	n	M	SD	SE	t	p
Relative Clauses	Male	30	5.93	2.77	0.51	-2.435*	.019
	Female	33	7.32	1.49	0.26		
Future Perfect and Future Continuous	Male	30	5.87	2.12	0.39	-1.518	.134
	Female	33	6.58	1.57	0.27		
Future in the Past	Male	30	9.00	1.36	0.25	-0.278	.782
	Female	33	9.09	1.23	0.21		

Note. n = 63. df = 61. Full score = 10 points. *p < .05.

Figure 3
Mean Post-test Achievement Scores by Gender



Note. Full score = 10 points.

Student Satisfaction With Game-Based Learning

Student satisfaction with game-based learning was high overall (M = 3.93, SD = 0.68). Across the three activities combined, the highest mean was found in the content dimension (M = 4.35, SD = 0.76). Game format and practical usefulness followed with equal mean scores of 4.14, although their standard deviations differed slightly. The lowest mean was found in attitude toward game-based learning (M = 3.53, SD = 0.64). Even so, the overall pattern indicates that students responded positively to the activities.

Table 4
Overall Student Satisfaction With Game-Based Learning Across All Activities

Dimension	Male		Female		Overall	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Content	4.30	0.81	4.38	0.72	4.35	0.76
Game format	4.20	0.75	4.09	0.87	4.14	0.82
Practical usefulness	4.22	0.83	4.07	0.91	4.14	0.87
Attitude toward game-based learning	3.61	0.49	3.47	0.73	3.53	0.64
Overall satisfaction	**3.98**	**0.62**	**3.88**	**0.72**	**3.93**	**0.68**

Note. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

When examined by activity, students reported a high level of satisfaction with game-based learning (GBL) across all lessons. The highest overall satisfaction was found in the Future Perfect and Future Continuous lesson (M = 4.09, SD = 0.52), followed by Future in the Past (M = 3.89, SD = 0.68) and Relative Clauses (M = 3.83, SD = 0.72), respectively.

In terms of content, students reported the highest level of satisfaction across all lessons, particularly in the Future Perfect and Future Continuous lesson (M = 4.49), which received the highest mean score. This suggests that the grammatical content was well-suited for implementation through game-based learning activities. These findings are summarized and illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5
Activity-Level Satisfaction Summary

Dimension/Lesson	Relative Clauses		Future Perfect and Future Continuous		Future in the Past	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Content	4.26	0.81	4.49	0.63	4.32	0.80
Game format	4.03	0.89	4.32	0.65	4.12	0.85
Practical usefulness	3.99	0.92	4.41	0.71	4.09	0.90
Attitude toward game-based learning	3.46	0.67	3.66	0.51	3.49	0.66
Overall satisfaction	**3.83**	**0.72**	**4.09**	**0.52**	**3.89**	**0.68**

Note. The table combines the three activity-level satisfaction summaries reported in the Thai source report.

The pre-test and post-test findings support the view that games can be used not simply as entertaining breaks, but as structured review tools that strengthen learning. In the present study, students' achievement increased in all three grammar lessons after game-based review. This pattern is consistent with the claim that games can attract attention, reduce boredom, and support repeated practice of target forms in a more relaxed atmosphere. As Singlor (2022) and Bamrung and Phusirit (2023) also found in earlier Thai studies, game-based activities can contribute to stronger language outcomes when they are aligned with instructional objectives.

One reason for this improvement may be that games encouraged students to interact more actively with grammar forms and meanings. Instead of relying only on lecture and memorization, students encountered the target structures through participation, movement, immediate response, and repeated exposure. Yudintseva (2015) argued that game-supported language learning creates high interaction and a safer environment for experimentation, allowing learners to try, fail, and try again without the same pressure often associated with formal testing or explanation. This interpretation aligns closely with the classroom observations that motivated the present study.

The gender comparison produced a more limited pattern. Female students significantly outperformed male students only in the Relative Clauses lesson, while no significant difference appeared in the other two lessons. This suggests that the gender-related effect was lesson-specific rather than broadly generalizable. The result may reflect differences in readiness, persistence, attention to detail, or participation during that particular lesson, rather than a consistent difference in grammar learning ability.

This interpretation is compatible with Olowookere et al. (2020), who suggested that educational performance may be influenced by learner characteristics such as diligence, discipline, responsibility, and emotional stability. In the present context, the female students' stronger performance in Relative Clauses may have been associated with greater preparation or closer attention during review. However, because the difference did not appear across all lessons, it should be interpreted cautiously.

The student satisfaction findings provide additional insight into how game-based learning operated in the classroom. Students rated the content, game format, and practical usefulness dimensions at high levels. These results suggest that the activities were perceived as relevant to what students were learning and that the games were viewed as understandable, engaging, and beneficial. At the same time, attitude toward game-based learning received the lowest ratings, falling only in the moderate range for Relative Clauses and Future in the Past.

The comparatively lower attitude scores in these two lessons may be related to the nature of the grammar topics themselves. Relative Clauses are highly useful in writing, but students may perceive them as less immediately applicable in everyday communication and more difficult to use spontaneously in short game rounds. Future in the Past also involves meaning relationships that require careful interpretation, which may limit the suitability of fast-paced game review. In other words, not every grammar point is equally well matched to the same kind of game-based activity.

These findings indicate that game-based learning should be used strategically. The approach can strengthen achievement and improve motivation, but its effectiveness depends on careful alignment between the grammar target, the form of the game, and the level and maturity of the learners. Teachers who use games in grammar instruction therefore need to design activities that balance enjoyment with sufficient cognitive time and linguistic depth.

Conclusion

This classroom research found that game-based learning improved Grade 11 students' English grammar achievement across three lessons and was associated with high student satisfaction. Female students outperformed male students only in the Relative Clauses lesson, whereas no significant gender difference appeared in Future Perfect and Future Continuous or in Future in

the Past. Overall, the study supports the use of game-based learning as a practical and meaningful strategy for reviewing English grammar in Thai EFL classrooms.

For classroom practice, the findings suggest that teachers should design games that are appropriate to the difficulty of the target grammar point and clearly connected to curriculum objectives. Teachers should also consider how groups are organized during gameplay and should take students' attitudes, language level, and maturity into account when selecting game types and activity formats.

For future research, it would be valuable to examine the longer-term effects of game-based learning, to compare traditional and digital game formats, and to include more diverse samples or other subject areas. Further studies could also investigate which types of learners benefit most from particular game elements, durations, or levels of challenge.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Surawiwat School and Suranaree University of Technology for the financial support provided for the publication of this research.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that ChatGPT was limited to and used for translation support from Thai to English, and language refinement. The research ideas, design, data, findings, interpretation, and academic responsibility remain with the authors.

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Naming Places, Narrating Selves: A Study of Locative Thai Film Titles and the Meaning of Spatial Identity in Contemporary Thai Films

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Spaces or places used for film titling may be a goal of travel for travelers who seek a new experience. In a Thai film called *Tha Rae: The Exorcist* (Wantha, 2025), Tha Rae refers to a village in Sakon Nakhon Province. This place is well-known as the largest community of Christians in the northeastern part of Thailand, which connects to the story in the film that presents the dimensions of beliefs and culture. This study mainly focuses on spaces in Thai films. Therefore, only Thai films by Thai film creators were selected, with the names of places or spaces in both Thai and English titles. Eight Thai films were selected for analysis, namely *Tha Rae: The Exorcist* (Wantha, 2025), *Halabala* (Thairaat, 2025), *Bangkok Dark Tales* (Onpapliw et al., 2019), *Siam Square* (Khumwan, 2017), *Sam Chuk* (Chaisati et al., 2009), *Laddaland* (Sakdaphisit, 2011), *Love of Siam* (Sakveerakul, 2007), and *OK Baytong* (Nimibutr, 2003). The objectives are to analyze their titles, stories, and the meaning of spatial identity presented through these films. The theory "The Production of Space" by Henri Lefebvre (1991) was used for explanation. This research explores how spaces signify symbolic meanings in contemporary Thai films. The study reveals that names and stories of locative Thai films bring new perspectives to recognize spaces in social, historical, and cultural dimensions. It is regarded as the construction of meanings and spatial identity in terms of reproduction and the creation of new meanings. Storytelling through films with locative stories can create an attractive experience in the perception of spaces, and can lead to some changes in the society.

Keywords: Thai films, Thai films title, production of space

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Introduction

The process of setting in the world of films is related to designing places, space, time, and the experiences of the characters. The key role of these designed factors is to guide the direction of a film and to create its symbolic meaning. A place and a space are two of the required components in the story. The place provides a meaning to the story. Thus, using the name of a place or space as the film title can draw attraction to a film and the primary perception framework for the audience, because they first recognize the film by its title before watching it in a cinema (Jongthakul, 2018). For this reason, the film title is significant and can bring an impression, motivation, or memory, and possibly affects its future income generation (Phaetkhacha, 2014).

Using the name of a place or a space for a film title may imply that the filmmaker intends to make the audience perceive the significance of that specific place or space, and thus it is chosen as the title of the film. Each space contains its own story, history or background, and meaning, with a variety of different perceived aspects. The research of Bernstein (2007) on *New York Placenames in Film Titles* describes that the name of a place in a film title has the role of creating a perceptual map in the audience's mind. The name acts as a milestone to define the meaning and mental image of the space at the social level. Thus, a film title with the word *"New York"* may signify modernity, independence, freedom, and urbanization, which reflects the identity of a space based on social imagination while possibly also simultaneously implying loneliness and the rush of life in a big city.

It can be noticed that names of the major cities and capitals of several countries or the names of countries around the world are frequently used as film titles, e.g., *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942), *Tokyo Story* (Ozu, 1953)*, New York, New York* (Scorsese, 1977)*, Good Morning Vietnam* (Levinson, 1987)*, Hotel Rwanda* (George, 2004), *Midnight in Paris* (Allen, 2011), and *Manchester by the Sea* (Lonergan, 2016). This phenomenon reflects that city and country names act as a spatial symbol connected to identities, memories, and cultural meanings based on social imagination. Using their names as film titles enhances the attraction to the stories, and it is done to emphasize the same meaning or to set a new meaning of the target place through an attractive story, possibly resulting in a trend of travelling to this place.

For the film *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942), the name of a city in Morocco, the story is about a middle-aged man who meets his ex-lover and her husband by chance during World War II. He wants to go to the USA. Thus, Casablanca in this context involves the war, escape, and the transitions of life. Likewise, the story of *Good Morning Vietnam* (Levinson, 19877) narrates Vietnam during the Vietnam War through the eyes of American soldiers. The scenes reveal the stressful war, parallel to a love story between an American soldier and a Vietnamese girl.

Midnight in Paris (Allen, 2011) depicts a young male novelist who loves Paris. He turns back the time to Paris in the old days. The film presents the beauty of Paris, the capital of France, with its charms and fullness of love as well as romance. A large audience became obsessed with the story of this film.

Apart from large cities, the names of small towns or small communities are also used as film titles. *Notting Hill* (Michell, 1999), for example, is a romantic film about a Hollywood female superstar falling in love with an ordinary man who owns a bookstore in Notting Hill, a well-known and fascinating place located in West London, England. Houses here are painted in pastel colors, a unique charm of Victorian architecture. There is Portobello Road Market selling

vintage objects and crafts, along with cafes. Notting Hill is actually reputable worldwide; however, when this film was released, the place became even more well recognized.

Paprach and Hashim (2022) conducted the study on *Destination Space in Film: Viewer Perspectives on Film Destination Contributions to Promoting Thai Tourism*. They found that there are eight spatial patterns presented in Thai films, i.e., exotic world, idyllic space, nostalgic space, modern space, spiritual space, martial art space, the features, and the meanings of space in a film. These are all the key components that set the emotional and conceptual meanings. Their roles are to set the perception of the place and to potentially promote tourism through spatial imagination.

Thus, the objective of this study was to examine how using names of places or spaces as film titles is significant and how it can reflect and define the meaning of space in the context of films. Three key issues were analyzed, i.e., 1) the patterns and practices of using names of places or a space as titles of Thai films; 2) the presentation of space and its meaning in Thai films; and 3) the setting of spatial identities through stories, characters, and social as well as cultural contexts in films.

Research Question

How can using the names of places or a space as a film title reflect and define the meaning of space in the context of a film?

Objectives

1. To analyze the patterns and practices of using names of places or a space as titles of Thai films.
2. To analyze the presentation of space and its meaning in Thai films.
3. To analyse the setting of spatial identities through stories, characters, and social as well as cultural contexts in Thai films.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre was used as the conceptual framework in this study. This concept describes space in a perspective that is broader than physical space. Nevertheless, space remains a social setting. The description is divided into three dimensions as follows (Lefebvre, 1991).

Spatial Practice or Perceived Space

This refers to space for living, space that exists in reality, and space that has boundaries and can be touched. It is concrete, can be physically used, and can be perceived through the five senses. In filmmaking, spatial practice is required as the places of stories, e.g., houses, markets, grocery stores, schools, hospitals, etc. They must be spaces for living, movement, and interactions among the characters, making space a necessary component for story development.

Representations of Space or Conceived Space

This refers to the conceptual setting of space, meaningfully designed with planning by architects or space design experts. Features and utilization are also determined, with space

control authority. It can be referred to as ideological space with fixed use, rules and regulations, and symbols. It is conceptual and provides the meaning of the setting toward space. In reference to films, space is more than merely the backgrounds or scenes; it is the outcome of the conceptual construction through production design, picture arrangement (*mise-en-scène*), and the setting of places and time. These play important roles in the implication and systematic connection to the points of stories.

Representational Spaces or Lived Space

This refers to the activity and experience of space of involved persons. Symbols are used, with conveyed meanings cultivated by their societies and cultures, that are convey the meanings of this type of space, which may be adjusted for its definitions, depending on experiences. Thus, it is the combination between physical and conceptual spaces. In films, this type of space usually appears through characters' experiences and audience perception. Space narrates the stories of life filled with emotional meanings, symbols, and imagination, e.g., space of memories, love, fears, or loss. It strengthens interpretation and space-related identities.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research study using textual analysis of eight Thai films by Thai directors and Thai filmmaking teams. The subject films were obtained by purposive sampling, of which titles must be associated with names of places or a space in Thailand and must be in Thai and in English. *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre (1991) was used for analysis to describe presentation and spatial identity setting in films. The films in this study included *Tha Rae: The Exorcist* (Wantha, 2025), *Halabala* (Thairaat, 2025), *Bangkok Dark Tales* (Onpapliw et al., 2019) *Siam Square* (Khumwan, 2017), *Sam Chuk* (Chaisati et al., 2009*), Laddaland* (Sakdaphisit, 2011), *Love of Siam* (Sakveerakul, 2007)*,* and *OK Baytong* (Nimibutr, 2003).

Key Findings

According to the results of all eight analyzed Thai films, three key issues were found, i.e., 1) the patterns and practices of using names of places or a space as titles of Thai films; 2) the presentation of space and its meaning in Thai films; and 3) the setting of spatial identities through stories, characters, and social as well as cultural contexts in films.

Forms and Practices of Using Names of Places or a Space as Titles of Thai Films

For the study on the patterns of place naming found in film titles, they can be divided into city names, area names, district or community names, village or community names, and nature-based names (Srisophon, 2023). It refers to spatial practice or perceived space available in reality. As for the use of names of places or spaces in all eight films, there is one name of a large and major city, two names of areas within large cities, two district names, two village names, and one nature-based name.

City Name

Bangkok Dark Tales (Onpapliw et al., 2019) uses the name of Thailand's capital. It is the name of the major city that is used to convey the meaning of the story. As the film title, it also acts as a spatial symbol with specific meaning. For example, Bangkok signifies a large city, the

center of the country, prosperity, and modernity while also signifying social problems that need to be solved for better development.

Area Names

Siam Square (Khumwan, 2017) and *Love of Siam* (Sakveerakul, 2007) use the name "Siam" in the film titles. Siam Square is one of the top economic areas in Bangkok. In the past, the location of Siam Square was a residential area with vegetable plots, under Chulalongkorn University. During urban expansion later on at the time of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, it was developed further as a shopping mall area. Subsequently, it grew more popular among teenagers until it finally became a landmark of Bangkok (Panchai, 2025).

District or Community Names

Sam Chuk (Chaisati et al., 2009) and *OK Baytong* (Nimibutr, 2003) are the names of two districts in Thailand with Sam Chuk being the name of a district located in Suphan Buri Province, not far from Bangkok. People there live a simple life. The district is outstanding for its trade economy and exchange of goods. There is Sam Chuk Old Market, a 100-year market, one of the remarkable places in Thai history (Sam Chuk District Public Health Office, 2022).

Similarly, Betong District, or the former name in Malay "Yarom," means a "needle." Later, the name was changed to Betong, which originated from the local rough giant bamboo. Like its name, it is large and originated from the Malay name of "Buluh Betong." In the district, this species of bamboo is available in a large quantity. Betong is the southernmost district of Thailand in Yala, renowned as "a city in the mist, with the prettiest flowers" (Faculty of Management Science, Yala Rajabhat University, 2020).

Village or Community Name

In the film *Laddaland* (Sakdaphisit, 2011), the name is that of a housing estate in Chiang Mai. According to the background, once it was also a famous tourist attraction. Mrs. Ladda was the owner. The village was beautiful until someone died here. After that, there was a legend of a ghost, a mystery, and a supernatural story. As a consequence, villagers gradually moved out until this place became completely deserted (Sanook, 2011).

Regarding the film *Tha Rae: The Exorcist* (Wantha, 2025), the name is that of the oldest and largest Roman Catholic community in Thailand, located in Mueang Sakon Nakhon District, Sakon Nakhon. It has a very long history of over 130 years. The word "Tha Rae" is based on its primary physical feature, i.e., laterite soil called "Hae stone" (minerals). Thus, this word has been used as the village or community name "Tha Hae," which was later changed to "Tha Rae" up until the present (Thaethiangtham, 2025).

Nature-Based Name

The film *Halabala* (Thairaat, 2025) was titled after the name of a wildlife sanctuary and the most well-known tropical rainforest in the southern part of Thailand, covering the areas of Narathiwat and Yala Provinces. Halabala is renowned as the most mysterious forest with very impressive natural beauty (Srisuk, 2003).

According to the findings, it can be noted that using the names of places or a space as film titles must be based on their attractive backgrounds or history and highlights, e.g., a large city with unique ways of life and people, a legend or story, and the beliefs related to that certain place or space.

Presenting Space and Its Meaning in Thai Films

When examining film contents, it was found that they mainly focus on narrating space as representations of space or conceived space and representational spaces or lived space. Their setting is related to space or places as the key components of the stories.

The films using the names of places in this group that are classified as horror and drama, totally five films, include *Bangkok Dark Tales* (Onpapliw et al., 2019), *Siam Square* (Khumwan, 2017), *Laddaland* (Sakdaphisit, 2011), *Tha Rae: The Exorcist* (Wantha, 2025), and *Halabala* (Thairaat, 2025). This reflects that space is used as an essential mechanism for emotions, meanings, and intensive experiences. The other three are dramas, i.e., *Sam Chuk* (Chaisati et al., 2009), *Love of Siam* (Sakveerakul, 2007), and *OK Baytong* (Nimibutr, 2003). Each presents a social problem that brings about review and questioning that eventually extend to awareness and possibly to solutions.

Bangkok Dark Tales: Struggling Life in Bangkok

Capitals or major cities are often used as film titles. Thailand's capital is Bangkok. *Bangkok Dark Tales* (Onpapliw et al., 2019) is a horror story, narrating ghost stories and mysterious tales in the large city (Urban Horror) under the Thai title "Bangkok…Sayong" which are the stories of three types of people in Bangkok, i.e., an office girl under work pressure, a female student from another province coming to rent a house in Bangkok who undergoes a mystery, and a cinema with a terrifying story.

This film presents the dark side of Bangkok. The area is used as setting the meanings of life in complex dimensions, e.g., struggling middle class to survive, the dream of someone from another province to search for urban opportunities, and fragile, complex social relationships.

Siam Square: Being Siam Teenagers Is Painful

Space is closely related to people and social groups, particularly urban areas that reflect ways of life and experiences. *Siam Square* (Khumwan, 2017) is a horror movie narrating the story of teenagers in Siam Square who see a female high school ghost at an extra tuition course held from the evening to the nighttime.

Siam Square is a space for teenagers, the middle class, and educational competitions. It is the center of tuition academies and self-development activities. At the same time, it is also a recreation space to escape from stress because there are a large number of shops, restaurants, and relaxing activities.

The film mainly presents night space, turning the image of this lively space into the silence, mystery, and loneliness connected to the experiences of teenagers with their attachment to Siam Square.

Love of Siam: Teenage Relationships and Forbidden Feelings

Siam Square also communicates love and relationships. *Love of Siam* (Sakveerakul, 2007) is a teenage drama about love and relationships in family and teenage love. Mew and Tong, the two young boys who used to be close friends during their childhood, meet again at Siam Square. Their reunion makes them discover a new relationship greater than friendship. But Tong's parents had to deal with the disappearance of his sister, and thus they are stuck in sorrow. The mother does not accept the relationship between Mew and Tong because she expects him to grow up like an ordinary teenager, to have his own family and children, and to live his life as per social expectations.

Siam Square signifies a free space for teenagers without control by adults. They can express themselves freely, e.g., playing music, having friends, and showing the feeling of love to the same sex with any fears of parents' eyes.

Laddaland: Dreams and a Broken Family of Urban Life

Urban expansion and the dream of a better life, e.g., having a house and a car, and sending children to a quality school, is a great reflection of the middle class in urban society. *Laddaland* (Sakdaphisit, 2011), for example, presents the story of a family moving from Bangkok to settle down in Chiang Mai. "Laddaland" is the name of a housing estate, representing a dreamy space for a better and more secure life.

This film was inspired by a tale about Laddaland Village, presented through a family with a father, a mother, a daughter, and a son. The father is a family leader with his dedication to work who builds economic security and social status. He buys their first house with convenience and full facilities.

However, stress, disagreements, and fragile family relationships are hidden under the perfect house. They see the ghost and bizarre situations in the village, which worsens their relationships and brings about holding on to the house, an external object, leading to the tragic ending of the father. This reflects that love and understanding among family members are of greater value than a beautiful house.

Sam Chuk: Giving a Chance and Listening to Teenage Problems

A local way of life and an image of a simple life in a rural society are presented through *Sam Chuk* (Chaisati et al., 2009). Sam Chuk is the name of a district in Suphan Buri and a drama narrating drug abuse, parallel to relationships and rural life. The story was inspired by real situations at Samchukratanapokaram School. Seven students undergo family problems and are addicted to drugs. Under this tension, a teacher protects and help the students (Guitarsolo, 2023).

Thus, Sam Chuk signifies the power of people who are ready to solve problems. The sympathetic teacher and school and the community give a chance for the teenagers to change themselves. Particularly, the teacher's efforts to help the students allow them to be able to finally return to the right path.

OK Betong: Amid Conflicts, People Still Try to Go On

Betong is the southernmost area of Thailand, adjoining Malaysia. Most of the people living here are Muslim. However, *OK Baytong* (Nimibutr, 2003) narrates the story of a Buddhist monk who must disrobe and live a secular life in order to take care of a niece because his sister unexpectedly dies from an explosion in Betong. Subsequently, he must learn how to live his secular life and start a new life as an ordinary man, e.g., using a mobile phone and riding a bicycle because he has been a monk since childhood.

Meanwhile, he must deal with loss and uncertainty in the southern border province in which conflicts among the groups of people with different ideologies still remain. Violence from attacks or explosions may occur at any time. According to the film's setting, Betong is still a livable and splendid city, signifying a simple way of life and several pleasant places in Betong where the combination of Buddhism and Islam that can live together. Like the name of the film, *OK Baytong* (Nimibutr, 2003), people there still try to live on.

Tha Rae: The Exorcist: Diverse Beliefs and the Fight Against Human Fears

Creating a strong community requires having a spiritual anchor. Tha Rae is the largest Christian community in Thailand, located in Sakon Nakhon. The film *Tha Rae: The Exorcist* (Wantha, 2025) takes the audience back to the world of history, beliefs, and rituals. The story begins when someone is possessed by a ghost. Shamans are invited to expel the ghost, i.e., a traditional shaman called "Moh Yao" and a Christian priest as Tha Rae is an area with various beliefs. The film presents the human effort to fight against the ghost or demon. With a strong mind, faith, and consciousness, humans will survive from ghosts or demons. Humans must fight against fears coming from outside related to supernatural entities and also the intrinsic fears of the characters for the sake of living peacefully.

Halabala: The Greatness of Nature

Halabala is an lush tropical rainforest in Thailand, located in Narathiwat and Yala. It is prominent in its biodiversity and mysterious nature. *Halabala* (Thairaat, 2025) presents the story of a police officer chasing after an offender who escapes into the forest of Halabala. The film reveals the images of the extraordinary, overgrown, dense and mysterious forest that indicates the greatness of nature.

The main character is a policeman or a government officer who is representative of humans with an attempt to use his authority and reason for controlling the area. Unfortunately, he must face his own limitations in the middle of uncontrollable nature. Thus, the forest was set as a challenging area against human capabilities and mental strength, along with his fragility when confronting nature.

Setting Spatial Identities Through Stories, Characters, and Social as Well as Cultural Contexts in Films

The space of films is set with attractive identities through stories, characters, and social as well as cultural contexts. The stories determine the frame of spatial meanings, while the characters represent local inhabitants, and the social contexts determine the cultural value and meaning of space.

Spatial Identities of Societies in Large Cities

According to the analysis of *Bangkok Dark Tales* (Onpapliw et al., 2019), the film presents the identity of Bangkok, in which people have to struggle for survival. The characters are working people who undergo social problems. Also, the identity of *Siam Square* (Khumwan, 2017) is a space for teenagers. The teenage characters encounter mysteries and the pressures of life. *Love of Siam* (Sakveerakul, 2007) depicts Siam Square with a narration of teenage identity. The characters are searching for themselves and learning about love and relationships. *Laddaland* (Sakdaphisit, 2011) presents a spatial identity about the middle class in a major city as well. The main character must fight against economic and social conditions for a better life.

It can be noted that all four of these films present a spatial identity setting in the societies of large cities, involving various groups of people, i.e., working people, students, teenagers, and families. These settings reflect the complex urban life in the economic, social, and human relationship dimensions. Spatial identities in the societies of large cities can be compared to a modern space which was established through economic and social systems and people's experiences.

Spatial Identities of Social Problems

Sam Chuk (Chaisati et al., 2009) and *OK Baytong* (Nimibutr, 2003) narrate situations of social problems, i.e., drug problems in Suphan Buri and insurgencies in Yala, a southern border province of Thailand. The problems in Yala are mainly about ideologies, beliefs, and involvement with complex history. Both films refer to a spatial identity setting which reflects social problems, cultural complexity, and relationships among local inhabitants. The characters are ordinary people, e.g., students, a teacher, a monk, and a struggling girl. Nonetheless, both films still reveal the ways of life and the beauty of people in small towns connected to nostalgic space. This is because, despite problems and conflicts, memories and hopes still remain.

Spatial Identities of Beliefs and Religions

Beliefs and religions are the key components in the way of life in Tha Rae community. They act as the center to determine the values, meanings, and ways of life there. *Tha Rae: The Exorcist* (Wantha, 2025) presents the issues concerned with religions and beliefs through a story related to exorcism, reflecting the roles of religions as a crucial mechanism to describe and to deal with supernatural entities. Thus, the space in this context is set through beliefs and rituals and can be compared to spiritual space. It is required in order to shape the community's self and to define the social and cultural meanings of space.

Spatial Identities of the Natural Area

Humans are part of the natural world and must therefore respect nature. *Halabala* (Thairaat, 2025) presents the greatness of the natural forest, where humans may be ordinary people who cannot defeat nature. Thus, this film was set within a natural and majestic space, reflecting the power-based relationships between humans and nature. It also points out the limitations of humans with regard to the need to dominate nature. Thus, in this film, Halabala is introduced as an exotic world full of mysteries and unfamiliarity for humans.

Conclusion

Setting space or worlds in films is significant in terms of defining meanings, imagination, and experiences in perceived space. Setting space is connected to existing meanings while also negotiating or defining new meanings with regard to space.

Despite the dark aspects of space depicted in several of the films examined in this study, i.e., social problems, conflicts, or obstacles, these films also show the dimensions of beauty, values, and attractiveness of space so as to open a new perspective for audiences. This might convince them to learn, to explore, and to understand the history, culture, and the local context of a certain area more than usual. Thus, films play an important role in setting the meanings and identity of space in social, cultural, and imaginary dimensions.

One of the key strengths of this study is that it approaches film titles not simply as names, but as cultural and symbolic spaces that shape audience perception. This research also highlights how Thai films construct spatial identities through stories, characters, emotions, and social contexts, showing that space in cinema is far more than a background setting.

By applying Henri Lefebvre's (1991) concept of The Production of Space, the study connects film studies with cultural and spatial studies, offering a deeper understanding of how films produce meanings, memories, and social imagination about places in Thailand.

This study is unique in its focus on Thai spaces and local identities and explores themes of urban life, youth culture, religion, border conflicts and nature. Taken together, these elements suggest the complexities of contemporary Thai society as cinematically represented. But still there are many uncharted spaces.

To conclude, this research reveals the importance and uniquely Thai representations of space in the cinema. These films tell stories that culturally imbue places and spaces and inspire audiences to become more interested in their locations, histories and social contexts through storytelling.

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The State Archives Reform in Portugal and the Societal Approach

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The most salient feature of human societies is their diversity and complexity. When its essence is captured, there are necessarily systemic dimensions and specific domains that stand out. The central aspects of the functioning of each community coexist both with transversal vectors and with more peripheral elements. Without the recognition of this multidimensional composition, the understanding of wholeness is compromised. Therefore, the processes of memorialization, to be able to convey the most accurate memory possible over time, must seek to apprehend the past in its entirety. To date, archival policies have focused mainly on safeguarding the memory of public organizations and some private ones, such as those of religious origin. The shift towards the societal approach aims to consistently broaden the range of protective action on non-public archives, in order to ensure their preservation and the construction of an inclusive, plural and democratic memory.

Keywords: archives, memory, societal approach, inclusive archives

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Introduction

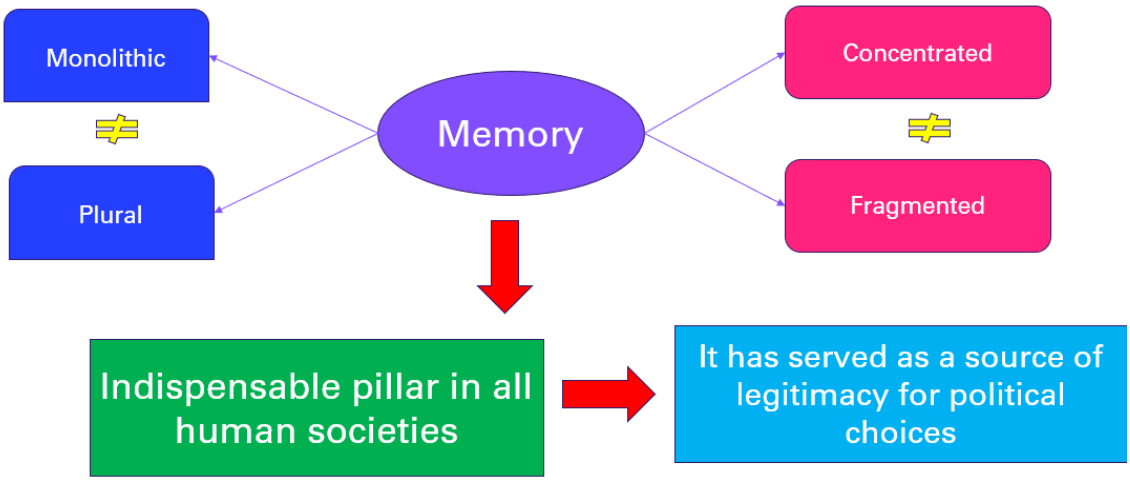
Memory is fragmentary and scattered. Nevertheless, it is seen as an essential pillar of human societies: from the most to the least sophisticated, none can do without memory for a wide range of purposes. Repeatedly, the past stubbornly refuses to pass. The past, which persists and extends into the present, and which is intended to be projected into the future, has been one of the fundamental drivers in shaping state policies, leading them cyclically to revivalist, revisionist, and regenerative projects where ancestral concepts are used to legitimize present choices. In this regard, consider the strong resurgence of aggressive nationalisms after the end of the Cold War. The twilight of ideological confrontation once again gave way to wars of conquest and conflicts of ethnic-religious bases. The past is, to a large extent, the fuel that justifies and feeds these disputes.

The proposed societal approach aims to ensure that archives are repositories of records about all expressions of society, and not just those privileged by political and administrative elites. The objective is to guarantee the right of future generations to have access to the past in its entirety and the obligation of the constituted powers to safeguard the memory of the entire community, without excluding anyone.

Memory, Archives and History

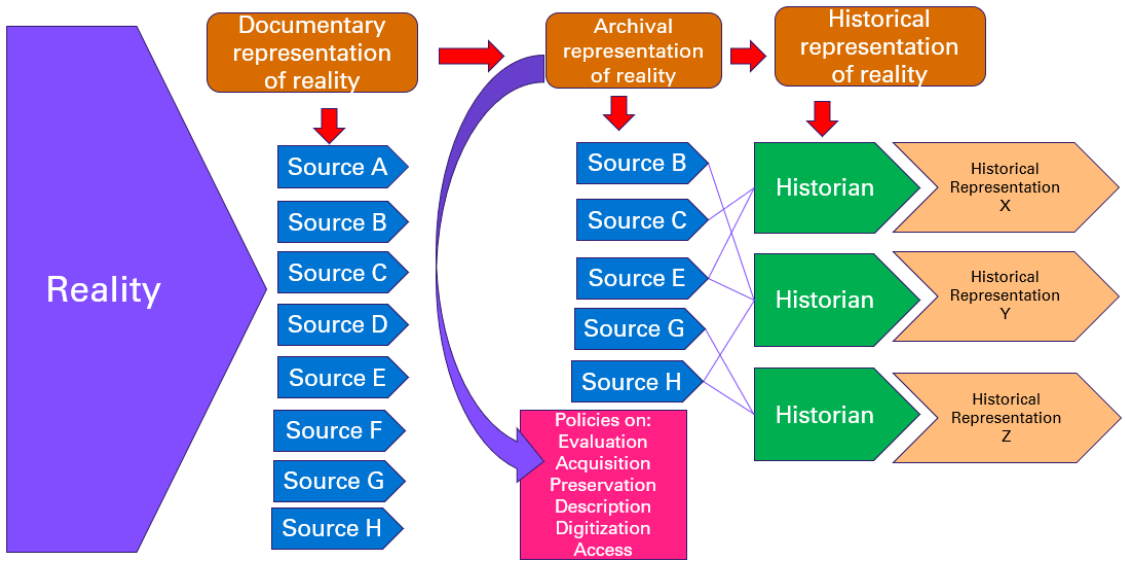
Memory is a powerful weapon that, in less appropriate hands, can be manipulated to serve power agendas, causing the suffering and elimination of millions of people. Hence the importance of ensuring that memory reflects and promotes the pluralism of societies and critical thinking, instead of single views imposed by certain minority groups or elites. Archives are one of the main factors that help build a memory where the healthy coexistence of perspectives outweighs the ability of some to favour only their own to the complete detriment of others. The silencing of some groups, expressions, or ideas is just as serious as the overvaluation of others. Naturally, there are realities whose importance and centrality are undeniable. However, they should not be assumed or imposed as the only norm, distorting historical truth. Monolithic views fall apart easily when faced with reality, even if minority, marginal, or peripheral dimensions are systematically ignored, hidden, silenced, or even suppressed. The truth always comes out.

Figure 1
Memory Characteristics



The question is whether it actually exists and what kind of truth we are talking about. Historiography, unlike myth and literature, presents itself as a bearer of truth. But it struggles with the problem of the credibility of sources and the process of producing History itself. When the reliability of sources is questioned, it's not just about doubting whether they are what they claim to be—in other words, their authenticity. The issue is much broader. We should understand that the History we receive comes from a process of refinement in which sources have undergone manipulations and setbacks, with a good part of them being lost. Thus, the raw material handled by historians is, by itself, a historical testimony and, consequently, a product of historical construction. Historians, therefore, cannot be naive when using sources. Besides confirming their authenticity, you should always keep in mind that sources are only partial representations and are linked to and influenced by a certain context. That is, the historian never has access to reality itself, in its entirety, nor, even less, to its evolution over time. With fragmentary data related to certain momentary contexts, with which they form more or less deep connections, they are left to throw themselves, like a craftsman, into creating their own representation of what happened.

Figure 2
The Process of Building History



Reality, that is, the facts, constitute themselves as a globalizing entity, unique and impossible to fully reconstruct. What reaches us are pieces of evidence (even fewer as time goes by) of its constant mutation. So, not only is it impossible to carry reality, as it is, into the future, but it also suffers from a state of constant change that makes freezing it difficult. The "remnants" that make it endure are usually documentary or oral representations that reflect it approximately, being closely tied to the partial contexts of those who produced them. Reality has blurred, and what we have left to see (and understand) it are the pieces of evidence it released instantly as it disappeared. However, the action of time generally has harmful effects on documentary records, which create a fixed picture of a constantly evolving reality. Records are lost relatively easily. And when they reach the archivists' hands, they, in turn, will carry out a set of operations that affect how future memory will be shaped.

The Power of the Archivists

The ascetic view of archivists, inspired by Jenkinson, has long ceased to be believable, having been replaced by a Schellenbergian perspective that empowers information professionals (Cook, 1997). Nevertheless, the archival representation of testimonies of past realities is fraught with modern and positivist concepts and is, at the same time, greatly limited by the conditions given to archivists to do their work: choosing which documents to protect, collect, preserve, or discard; deciding which documents to describe and digitize, how and when to describe and digitize them; determining access rules; planning heritage outreach strategies, etc. So, even though the archivist has secured their place in shaping History, their actions are still strongly constrained by various external factors.

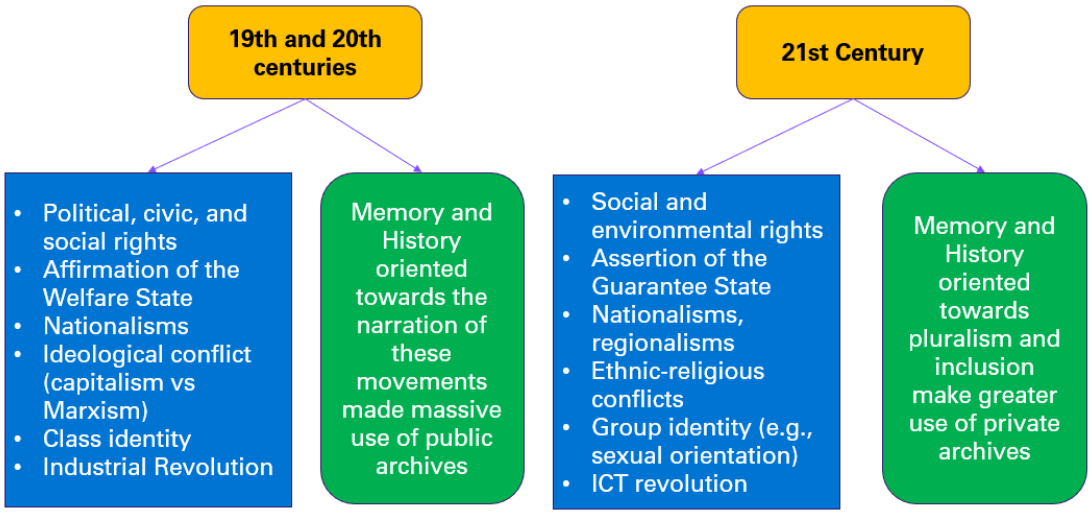
The application of archival policies introduces changes to the "remnants of the past," giving them a new aspect. We are going through a transition from archives to the postmodern paradigm, where understanding the contexts of production takes precedence over the study of documents (Cook, 1997). However, this focus on contexts does not eliminate the need to continue valuing documents per se. I even believe that understanding each document as proof and testimony of the past does not undermine, but rather strengthens, the consolidation of knowledge about its production context. Just as studying a particular reality only makes sense if it's based on documentary representations that give it consistency. The two perspectives complement and complete each other. After all, both of them fit into the realm of archival representation of reality, trying to provide researchers and the general public with a measured picture of the past, structured according to the archivists' concepts and tools. After their intervention, the remaining documents, and the way and time they are presented and made available to the community, can significantly influence the stage of historical representation of reality itself.

In this way, diving into the past is a risky adventure. The sources are full of traps, loose pieces, and gaps that prevent an entirely faithful historical recreation. And if you add each historian's perspective, the truth becomes even more relative. Not because it stops being true, but because it is assumed as one representation among many, where the conclusions reached mainly come from personal perspective, the questions asked, the sources chosen, and the historian's storytelling ability. To give them credit, it should also be remembered that their job isn't just to recreate reality or take the reader on a visit to the past. A historian's work goes beyond that. So, beyond handling History as a teacher of life, the historian needs to be able to grasp social, economic, and cultural movements that explain the dynamics experienced in those times and can even help illustrate more specific or even individual phenomena and behaviors. Obviously, there's always a tension between structures and individuals. The historian's skill lies in being able to connect these two worlds in a way that produces believable explanations of the past that, beyond merely describing it, add more knowledge to what already exists.

The New Archives and the New History

Today, democratic societies are going through a process of strengthening human rights. Minorities, the most vulnerable, the discriminated against, and the forgotten, among others, have been gaining increasing prominence on the political and media agenda, influencing public policies. Just like in the 20th century with the rise of the welfare state, when countries implemented extensive social policies, nowadays states are grappling with the need to implement inclusive policies. Not without resistance. Especially because these new policies are based on agendas that are divisive from a values standpoint.

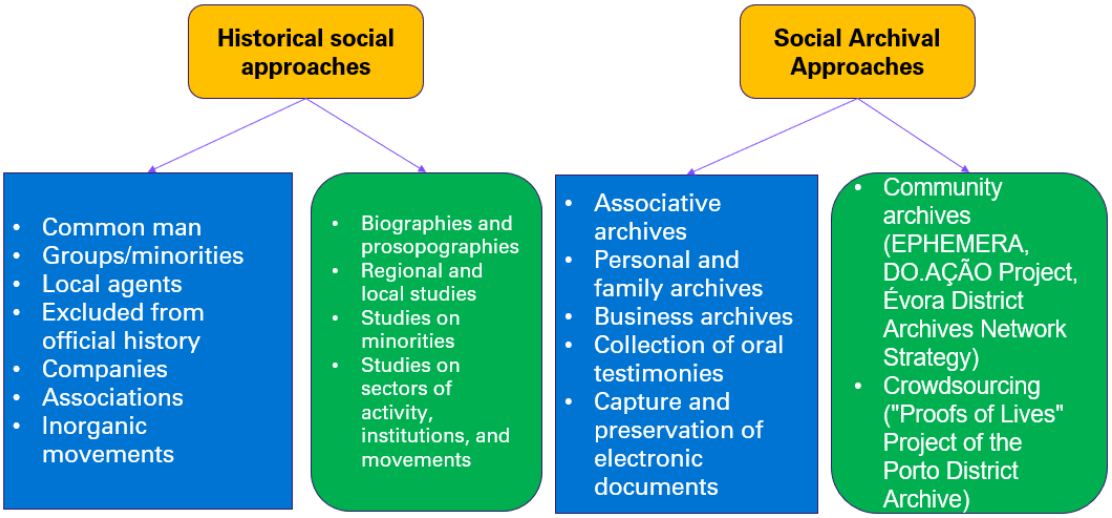
Figure 3
Contemporary Societies vs Memory, History, and Archives



At the same time, the past reemerges as a stage for intense conflicts. There is even a call for the use of collective therapy mechanisms aimed at eradicating the wrongs committed against certain groups throughout history. Today, history increasingly takes on a justice-oriented character when it subjects past events to present-day judgments. This strategy isn't new. However, using this oversimplifying method that puts the past at the mercy of values different from its own context makes it harder to understand past contexts, somewhat undermining the role of the historian and of history itself.

If in the 19th and 20th centuries individuals mostly came together around national or class values, in the 21st century they increasingly group themselves into identity-based solidarities (e.g., ethnic-racial, generational, religious, environmental, food-related, or sexual orientation), territorial (e.g., national, regional, and local), and organizational (e.g., sports affiliation). Societies are changing. States are trying to respond to these changes, and archives end up, sooner or later, having to reflect these changes. Even more so because these changes are accelerated by intensive use of ICT, which generates overwhelming amounts of information without, in many cases, ensuring its recovery and preservation.

Figure 4
The Historical Approach and the Archival Approach Oriented Towards the Societal Approach



Beyond the records produced by the Public Administration and the private documentation already kept in public archives, it seems essential to safeguard the memory generated by society as a whole, including the Diasporas, here in coordination between the sending countries and the host countries. In other words, we are gradually moving towards adopting a societal, holistic approach to ensure that the memory projected for the future reflects the whole society and not just a part of it. The memory of dominant or more assertive groups is gradually giving way to a memory of everyone and for everyone.

Beyond the major figures, events, and the most notable organizations, attention is given to the ordinary person, to groups, local actors, those excluded from official history, companies, associations, and non-organic movements. This choice does not mean excluding the individual from History, but rather giving a voice to more people in a bottom-up perspective. There is a trend toward the massification and democratization of memory and History among the general public by allowing them to take part in its creation, leaving us their testimonies and narratives. Local, regional, and institutional history is being promoted, along with less explored topics, as well as biographical and prosopographical history. But there is still a long way to go when it comes to the History of people who shaped the development of institutions, economic sectors, and local communities. From local politicians to trade unionists, from athletes to artists, from association leaders to religious figures, the room for progress in studies is immense.

Shaping the Societal Approach: Portuguese Case Studies

In recent years, initiatives have emerged in our country, both public and private, to address this reality. The concept of community archives has gained traction, largely based on the collection of testimonies and documentation. Crowdsourcing, relying on volunteer work, has also been used for creating archival descriptions, thus speeding up the production of inventories and catalogues. In this regard, see the “Proofs of Life” Project by the Porto District Archive, through which thousands of parish record descriptions have already been produced. As for the collection of private documentation, public archives have done so within their means. The Porto District Archive, with the DO•AÇÃO Project, is an example of this approach. However, space limitations and the shortage of resources to meet their responsibilities, focused on public sector information management, prevent them from taking broader action. This is why associations like EPHEMERA have been establishing themselves in this field, collecting, processing, and making available documentation from various sectors of society.

Beyond these cases, there are examples, especially at the university and municipal levels, that should be highlighted. The 25th of April Documentation Center at the University of Coimbra has made it possible to collect, process, and disseminate materials on this topic. In the same context, but more specifically, the Montemor-o-Novo Municipal Archive created the Agrarian Reform Documentation and Archive Center, which houses about 600 linear meters of documents from collective production units and unions. On a more local level, there is the Reguengos de Monsaraz Municipal Archive, which has been collecting, processing, and making available for public consultation almost all the public and private documentary collections existing in that municipality. These last two examples served as inspiration for the launch of the “Strategy for the Safeguarding of the Archival Heritage of the District of Évora” which, since 2019, has already made it possible to process and make available to the public around thirty archival collections from different municipalities and origins.

Figure 5
Objective and Previous Examples of the "Heritage Safeguarding Strategy for the Évora District"

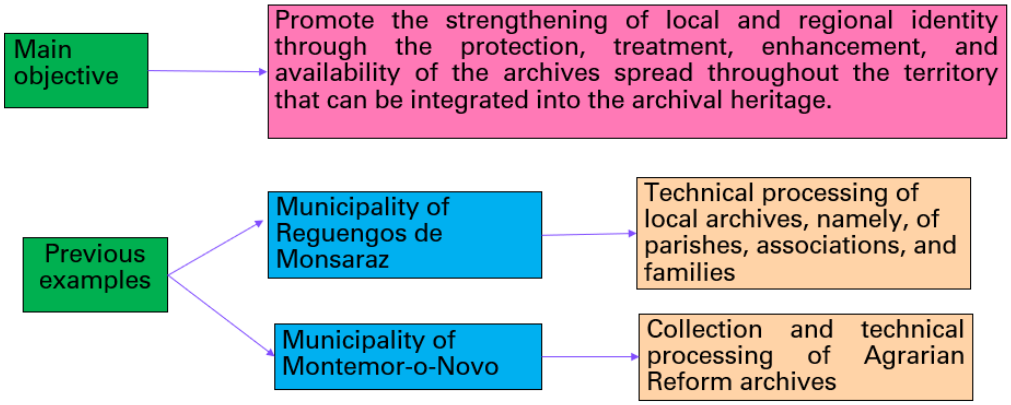
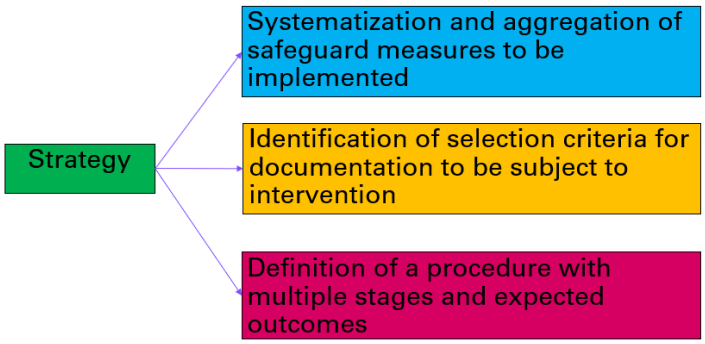


Figure 6
Heritage Safeguarding Strategy for the Évora District



The New National Archival Policy

All these initiatives are relevant. However, they seem scattered and unable to effectively tackle the challenge of preserving memory. The current legislation tries to manage the difficult balance between the desire for protection, the available resources, and the rights and duties of public entities and private individuals. Decree-Law No. 447/88, of December 10, which regulates the pre-archiving process of documentation from public entities and (possibly) some private entities, mainly protects documentation originating from the public sector. It requires the direct and indirect administration services of the State and local authorities to have document management regulations, as well as Charities, legal entities of administrative public utility, and other public entities or private entities whose documentation is declared of public interest. Although no individual or legal entity is excluded, the lack of automatic application to more sectors allowed a large set of documents to be undervalued, and perhaps discarded, like those of private companies or political parties.

The General Regime of Archives and Archival Heritage (Decree-Law No. 16/93 of January 23), as well as the Basic Law on the policy and regime for the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage (Law No. 107/2001, of September 8), clearly give priority to public archives when it comes to protected archival heritage. Private archives are only included after being classified or while they are in the process of classification. And private holders can, in certain

circumstances, oppose the classification, limiting the possibility of effectively protecting this heritage and even putting the memory contained in them at risk.

Faced with a reality where the safeguarding of records from various types of entities (especially private ones) and individuals shows multiple weaknesses, we need to think about what memory should be preserved in the future and what model could support this new vision. The criteria set out in Law no. 107/2001, of September 8, can serve as a guideline for what should be kept. However, instead of opting for a case-by-case approach, a more effective route could be to approve a strong regulatory framework that automatically extends the protection of archival heritage to more documents and information and provides resources aimed at increasing the effectiveness of policies. Even to avoid, in the future, these laws becoming just dead letter.

The criteria for the collections to be included in the archival heritage could be more systematically organized, favouring elements such as age, the legal nature of the institution, its territorial scope, the number of people covered by an entity, or the status of a public figure. Additionally, of course, there's the application of broad archival evaluation criteria. So, if the law states that public archives over 100 years old should be classified as of national interest, a solution of this scale could be considered to protect all existing information in the country, both in the public and private sectors. As for the legal nature of institutions, it seems clear that those with an associative or foundational character, whether or not they have public utility, as well as media organizations, could also be required to preserve their documentation and have document management tools, similar to what happens with charity institutions. This universe would also include civic movements and political parties. The territorial scope (national, regional, or local) of the assets in question could be relevant for the level of protection to be applied (national, public, or municipal interest). The criterion regarding the number of people involved is mainly aimed at the business sector. Considering that keeping records for most companies would be unfeasible, priority would eventually have to be given to those that employ more workers. Finally, public figures from various fields. This category is the hardest to define, and the records that need to be kept would obviously have to take aspects like privacy and intimacy into account.

Figure 7
Safeguard Measures



Figure 8
List of the Archival Assets of the Municipality Subject to Protection Measures

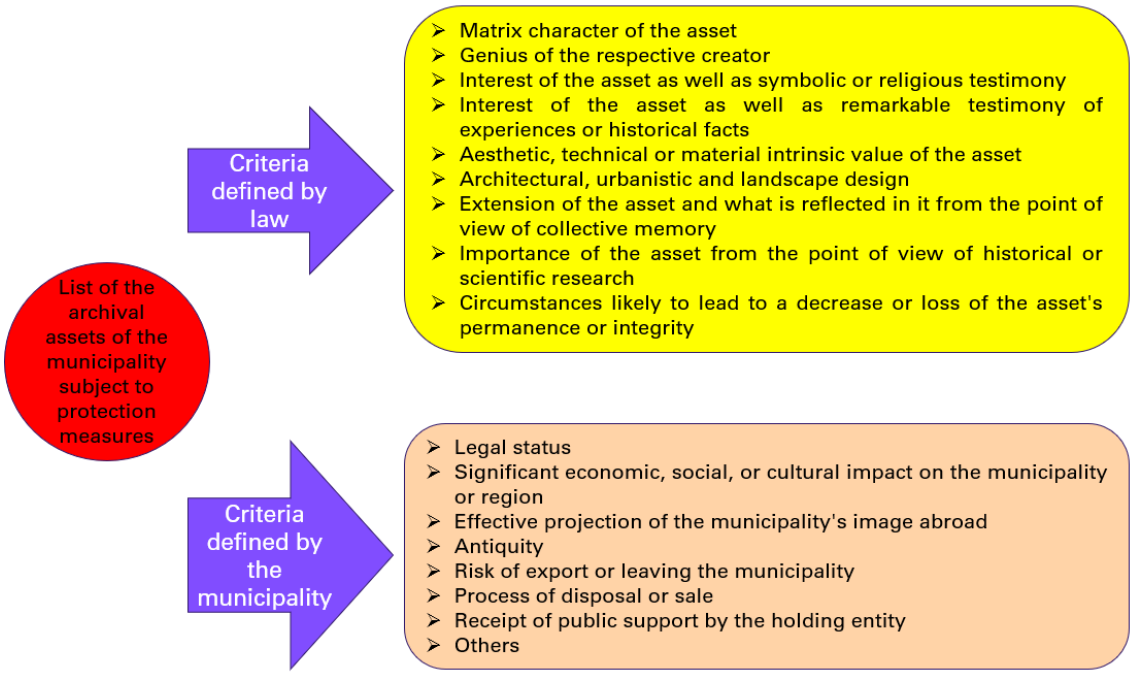
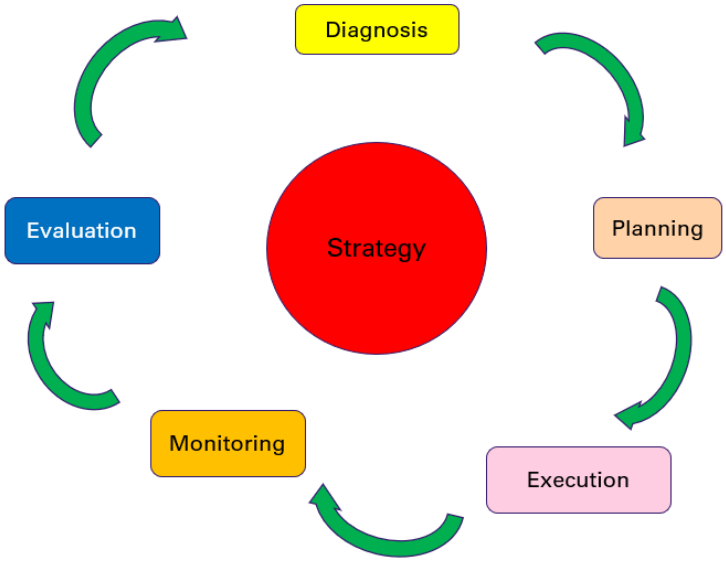


Figure 9
Safeguard Strategy Management Cycle



Once the types of collections to be protected and the measures to be applied are established, the question of their practical implementation inevitably arises. In this area, the solution could depend on a combination of actions, namely by strengthening partnerships between the State, universities, municipalities, and private entities whenever they lack the means to ensure the protection and public access to documentation. These partnerships, as has already been happening, would range from the permanent transfer of documentation to public archives, to simple deposits, as well as the processing, digitization, and availability of documentation for public consultation. The public entities that provide this support have supplied space, services, goods, and equipment according to their capacities and the specific needs of the supported

entities. In a strategy aimed at a societal approach, where the “protective hand of the law” would expand considerably, the resources available to achieve this goal would, naturally, must increase, but the benefits for society would also be much higher, since the number of protected files with available information would grow exponentially.

It is obvious that the State does not have the capacity to solve the problem on its own nor should it meddle in all archives. But it can point the way and create the minimum conditions for archives to be effectively preserved, managed, and made available by various actors. In fact, Articles 20 and 44 of the General Regime of Archives and Archival Heritage already foresee the possibility of providing technical and financial support and economic incentives when an individual is required to preserve their documentation and make it available to the public. These possibilities, if implemented through archive support programs with clear and firm rules regarding obtaining support in exchange for the preservation and public access to collections, would constitute a powerful tool.

Obviously, the support and the compensations would be part of the set of benefits offered to individuals, such as technical assistance, goods, equipment, and spaces. This model, already implemented in various forms by some public entities, like the ones mentioned earlier, could speed up the protection and enjoyment of an increasingly larger number of collections without the actual costs becoming unmanageable, especially since they tend to spread out over time and materialize unevenly depending on each situation. The existence of a national public program to support treatment and access to archives, as well as the approval of another program similar to the Municipal Archives Support Program (PARAM), aimed at the entire public sector and private entities committed to the protection and public availability of archival heritage, could certainly become key areas of action in the future if the country adopted the societal approach analysed here.

Conclusion

This approach, which seems to be gaining more and more traction along with the gradual involvement of communities, especially municipalities and associations like EPHEMERA, stems from society's need to further expand the memory it wants to project of itself and the response that public and private entities want to give to the aspirations of citizens and groups increasingly sensitive to values focused on inclusion and pluralism. Societies have become more demanding. In the future, it will be seen whether they are truly willing to implement an approach that brings greater obligations and costs in exchange for the valuable return that archives can provide in favour of memory.

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Dialogues on Dharma: Perspectives on *Bhagavad Gita* and *Shanti Parva*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The question of dharma, especially in the context of social duty and self-mastery, has been the central philosophical concern in the sacred texts of *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Individual action amidst tumultuous realities result in several contemplative phases of leadership, particularly affecting the characters in the Mahabharata. The Gita as a divine text carrying the message of the Supreme Divinity is an important prelude to the *Shanti Parva*, where the chaotic aftermath of the battle has left Yudhisthira at crossroads of renunciation and the life of an Emperor. Through this research paper, it is sought to unearth the fundamental lessons on dealing with the moral and existential crisis faced by a leader who has been involved in as big a scale of fatal and moral correction as the war of Kurukshetra was. This thematic study of selected verses, sections, and chapters of the "*Shanti Parva*" in *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Gita*, is an exploration of the philosophical conundrums, existential complexities that surround a human being who has reached crossroads of choices and decisions. Four central themes are analyzed here: self-restraint in a leader, desireless action (*nishkama karma*), leadership as seva, and liberation for the worldly. The paper attempts to build the dharmic perspective of a leader in *Shanti Parva* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, with specific focus on epistemes on operational ethics, rationale of delegating social roles in the defined spectrum of a leader in a society. Dharma is an important precedent to ensure a leader is effective through self-mastery.

Keywords: action, Dharma, *Bhagavad Gita*, leadership, self, *Shanti Parva*

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Introduction

Hindu philosophy has given a plethora of concepts to the world, which have been deliberated upon, projected across and within a variety of contexts, as well as ruminated for its multifarious applicability and understanding in general. One such context is *dharma*. One thing is conclusive, dharma is intricately linked to the ideal way of life a human being is recommended to lead, and also determines the kind of "living" of a specific human person. Etymologically speaking, the root word "dhr" in *dharma* means "to hold" (Sequeira, n.d.), which has further been substantiated by M. Hiriyanna (1949) as "the basis of all order, whether social or moral." The conundrum of pointing the limited and focused meaning of *dharma* has been acknowledged by several scholars. In the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, the 14th verse of the 4th Brahmana details that the highest principle above which nothing exists, and to which all must comply, is *dharma*. In essence, it is "law or justice… that which constrains the unruly wills and affections of people" (Radhakrishnan, 1953). If a rule is established, it is to create a point of reference for all actions amongst varieties of beings with different motivations and predispositions. Dharma becomes the focal point where a general agreement of the "rightness" of different aspects of living occurs across societal and personal differences. Dharma in terms of an image resonates with balancing the extremes within a person and in a society, intricately linked to the moral, social, and personal order which needs to be upheld with accountability and integrity. Dharma is connected to the individual in specific and the ideal human life that brings in harmony and order for the world around, in general. Sage Devasthana, in *Mahabharata*, captures the aspect of dharma as follows: "…dharma lies in not injuring any being and in non-injury, truthfulness in speech, sharing, fortitude, forgiveness, procreation on one's own wife, gentleness, modesty and steadfastness"; furthermore he stresses that the ruler has the responsibility of establishing one's subjects on the path of dharma and must follow dharma him/herself (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 12.21).

This paper is an exploration of the concept of dharma, the integral core of the individual, as extrapolated across dialogic teachings within *Mahabharata*, with specific focus on understanding leadership as a role and an ingrained performance. The study highlights dharmic leadership as discussed in the "*Shanti Parva*" and "*Bhagavad Gita*" sections of *Mahabharata*. Close-reading of the sections were done in order to narrow down the common understandings and themes discussed within the larger frame of *dharma*. Four themes emerged: Self-Restraint in a Leader; Desireless Action (Nishkama Karma); Leadership as Seva; Liberation for the Worldly. These themes were comparatively analysed across the two specific sections in order to understand the scope of dharmic rule as suggested by *Mahabharata*.

Understanding Mahabharata

One of the two epics in Hindu religion, *Mahabharata* is an account of the great warrior clan of Hastinapur, who got enmeshed into the Battle of Kurukshetra over long-standing issues of good deeds and evil misadventures. Kauravas and Pandavas, cousins by birth and enemies by deeds, fight against one another in a battle that nearly extinguishes all clans of the Indian subcontinent. The epic is narrated to King Janamejaya, the grandson of Arjuna the Pandava, by Krishna Dwaipayana. This epic has 18 *parvas*, or sections, with about 220000 lines (Dowson, 1982). *Mahabharata* uses allegory to portray philosophical messages, with debates and discussions being predominant features of eliciting thoughts within the readers' minds and to enable rumination and imbibing of ideals, values, and ethical notions to occur. Discourses on the nature of duty, attitude towards execution of a responsibility, and performing the action- these are three vectors that arise in discussions on various forms of dharma (when taken as the *doing*

of duty) in *Mahabharata*. Calling the *Mahabharata* as "a veritable encyclopedia of dharma," Swami Harshananda (2012) notes that well-developed ideas of dharma as performing ordained duties righteously, *purusharthas* being shown as a "scheme of life," and relaxations of rules and laws in times of emergencies and distress portrayed the "robust common sense" of the author, Veda Vyasa. In the context of action, what particularly engages the researcher's eyes are that this epic is oft-quoted and studied by scholars for its discourse on leadership styles, attitudes, personalities and managerial wisdom.

Bhagavad Gita

In the sixth *parva* of *Mahabharata*, the "Bhishma Parva," readers encounter Arjuna's anxiety just before the war begins at the thought of killing his own cousins and *guru*, posited opposite to him as the enemy on the battleground of Kurukshetra. Sri Krishna pauses the chariot between the two armies, and gives Arjuna an elaborate discourse on human life, the immortal and transcendental *atman*, and the way action and values had to be weaved to ensure a just performance of one's duties and responsibilities. This section of the Bhishma Parva became the source of religious and spiritual knowledge for Hindus across millennia, and came to be called the Bhagavad Gita, or "Song of the Lord." *Bhagavad Gita* is a treatise of dharma invariably as it explains the nature and purpose of dharma in the world. It elaborates on human thoughts, nature and actions which needs to work towards upholding dharma. This section talks of three *margas* or paths of liberation, Bhakti Yoga (way of devotion), Jnana Yoga (way of knowledge), and Karma Yoga (way of action). These three paths unite to define the nature of a righteous, devout and detached human being who can find that liberation from *samsara*, the endless cycle of life and death. Through the human form of Arjuna, momentarily the commander of the Pandava army in a battle stricken with doubt and emotional turmoil, Sri Krishna offers advice on doing duty with a stable mind and internal equanimity. The message of righteousness as *dharma* is reinforced in the Gita through mental and metaphysical dimensions of being in the mortal world.

Shanti Parva

The twelfth parva of *Mahabharata* is *Shanti Parva*, where Yudhisthira undergoes a sense of dissonance and abject feeling of helplessness, and disgust, over the aftermath of the gruesome war. He decides to leave the kingdom and take up the life of a recluse. With countless advisors advising against leaving his pending duty as the Emperor, Yudhisthira engages in conversation with Bhishma, the Grandsire of Kuru dynasty who advises him on various aspects of *dharma* of the ruler. This *parva* is the longest in the entire epic, and arguably substantiates the practical application of the principles of *dharma*, *karma*, path to *moksha* through duty and attitude of the ruler towards one's duty and subjects. Several researchers have extensively studied the nature of governance and kingship models put forth by Bhishma, Vyasa and other sages while they prepare Yudhisthira for the upcoming role as a leader in the face of chaos and mass destruction (Garg, 2004; Pareek, 2015; Saha & Khatun, 2023). For some researchers, the *Mahabharata* understanding of the Varna system in the context of Indian society stood out as a predominant feature of *Shanti Parva* (Gowda, 2015). The political philosophy of Bhishma arguably appends to the philosophy of human life expounded by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.

"Dialogue" Pedagogy in *Mahabharata*

Oral tradition marks the traditional ways with which knowledge was transferred across generations. The knowledge in Ancient Hindu tradition is said to have been passed down as *shruti* (heard/oral) and *smriti* (remembered/recorded) texts. The Hindu Epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, are identified as *smriti*. However, what is intriguing is the manner in which the epic records the primary *shruti* way of transferring knowledge of events, philosophies, commentaries on actions of different characters, and its interpretation by the *vakta* (conversationalist). There is literally a record of dialogic (*samvaada*) way of presenting the storyline. In essence, Veda Vyasa (author of *Mahabharata*) and Valmiki (author of *Ramayana*) are credited for reworking on narratives of human experience that existed in order to present it as a poetic epic (Phuyal, 2026). They essentially created a *smriti* of the *shruti*. In Indian traditions, stories have remained a crucial phase of shaping perspectives, transmitting knowledge, facts, information, skills and building resilient, ideal characters out of individuals. "Storytelling traditions in India have always been didactic, serving the purpose of transmitting knowledge related to leadership, ethics, statecraft, diplomacy, etc." (Sharma & Balhara, 2025). *Mahabharata* relies on human experience used as basis by teachers giving knowledge as the most valid testimony (*Shabda Pramana)*. Existence and its various aspects – good and bad- remain the biggest conundrum that stabilizes knowledge; this encourages intellectual and philosophical ruminations within the human mind. Dialogic methods- to relay stories with connoted and denoted meanings, as well as depict allegorical elements exemplifying desirable and non-desirable values and behaviors- are most prominent pedagogical techniques in the case of Hindu epics.

Dharma in *Mahabharata*

The battle of *Mahabharata* is essentially an event that led to several revelations, moderations, periods of enlightenment and revisionary approaches to life being taught, and upheld. The very event of bloodshed, mass destruction and chaos set about a physical and mental state of helplessness in everyone. The dialogues that occur in the *Shanti Parva* and Bhagavad Gita project this sense of incoherence reigning in those who received the knowledge of dharma imparted by sages, Bhishma and Sri Krishna- Yudhisthira and Arjun. Both were plagued with the abject horror of the doom that war tends to bring. While Yudhisthira feels, "we have ourselves slain those who are our own," (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 12.7), Arjuna physically and mentally becomes weak and fragile before the war after seeing *swajana* (people of my own) in front of him (*Bhagavad Gita*, 1984, 1.28–29). The fundamental cognition of their enemies being related to them, creates despondency due to crisis between moral duty (to eliminate the forces of *adharma* or misconduct) and filial affection (due to the opposition in war being family members). The discourse on dharma given to both of them begins with the dismantling of fear rooted in a strong sense of material bondages to people owing to blood relations by bringing into force the supreme duty of a human being- to follow the path of conduct or dharma and to ensure any force of disorder is not given an opportunity to amass that and unleash cruelty on a multitude of people in their power-heady state of mind.

Lessons of dharma in *Mahabharata* also addresses the state of mind and conscious approach by the individual towards one's duties, responsibilities as dictated by the social roles and relationships they handle. For this, equanimity of thoughts and emotions, and inner stability have been reinforced time and again as a desired state of mental and emotional well-being for those who need. *Sthitaprajna*, the state of "steady wisdom and deep introspection" (Bhagavad Gita, 1984, 2.54) is a result of understanding the metaphysical reality of the undivided, eternal,

formless and birthless self or atman. Vaishampayana advises Yudhisthira to remove the confusion and perplexity caused by grief, after which one loses sense of self and control over one's thoughts and emotions (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 12.16). Equanimity of mind and steady sense of self within the ruler is reinforced as a message by Bhishma too, in the *Raja Dharma* section. Thus, the question of understanding oneself and then learning the manner of regulating this self in different situations across life, is integral to know the working of dharma.

Self-Restraint in a Leader

Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* espouses the distinction of the true nature of Self and the perceived nature of our selves. The true nature of the *atman* (also referred to as the highest self or *Paramatman* in the image of spiritual progress) is that it resides in bodies but itself remains "free from all action and stain" (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 13.31). He stresses that the "imperishable and unlimited" Self is "embodied" in the perishable human body (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 2.18). In the *Shanti Parva*, the youngest Pandava, Sahadeva, advises Yudhisthira on the differentiation of "*mama*" (it is mine; which he calls as "death") and "*na mama*" (it is not mine; which he calls eternal) within the scope of one's own self. Sahadeva emphasizes the need for internal renunciation from mortal relations and the path of selfless duty with the following logic: "if it is certain that the soul cannot be destroyed, then, by destroying the bodies of beings, one does not cause any violence" (*Mahabharata,* 2013, 12.13). Overall, the Raja Dharma section of the *Shanti Parva* scholastically is a trove of applicative knowledge of that which has been propounded by Krishna in the Gita. Only by understanding the true nature of self as beyond the mortal body, can one perform roles, and execute dharma in the appropriate manner. Dharma is contextual, since it is time and again emphasized as depending on the situation and the person who is acting out the rules of dharma. Self-regulation is nothing but a controlled flow of internal being by realizing the true nature of the *atman* as beyond physical emotions and bondages. The aspect of suffering is a necessary context that somehow becomes a test of the equanimity of self within the characters involved in the war. Upholding dharma is a responsibility. What is unique to the two sections of dialogic teaching is how the effervescent and metaphysical truths of self is reinforced through material and physical tests of time, with an aim to prepare the mindset of people to tread the path of establishing a dharmic society.

Desireless Action (*Nishkama Karma*)

The spirit of detachment from all feelings and thoughts that bind us to impermanent, transitory and material things in life, is seen as an important pre-requisite for the leader who has the primary duty to oversee the operations of life around in a dharmic manner. In the *Mahabharata*, one aspect that is shunned across all discourses and tales that surround the theme of responsibility and duty is "overindulgence." In the path of doing actions (karma), it is desirable to have the dharmic orientation which is all about "balance." Imbalance and overtness of any tendency-being indulgence when moderation is ideal, or being reclusive when involvement is necessary- brings harm and does not lead to overall goodness of the individual and all that one is responsible for in the world. In Hindu philosophy, there are 4 kinds of goals that all human beings strive for. These are called the *purusharthas*, which are *Dharma* (duty), *Artha* (economic well-being), *Kama* (sensual pleasures) and *Moksha* (liberation from endless cycle of life and death). In the *Shanti Parva*, execution of dharma entails a regulated manner of approaching the fulfilment of the three objectives of Dharma, Artha and Kama. To ensure this regulation, *dandaniti*, the discipline of "the rod" is repeatedly suggested as a tool of justice for the ruler in the society he/she governs. *Danda* or the rod is an object which can balance things, measure when used as part of the scale, and can punish when used to deliver results of one's

evil actions. This act of *damana* or control, can subdue those who may not be following the rules and regulations that make a society function effectively and be constructive. In essence, the aspect of *danda* is not just an image of punishment, it also symbolizes internal balance. Sage Vaishampayana asserts that the *danda* "controls and punishes" all; it essentially creates a balance and control of the three purusharthas which people attempt to achieve in their secular life-*dharma, artha, kama* (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 12.15). When asked about the three gunas, Bhishma warns about the side-effects of having either of the three in excess: "Dharma is stained by jealousy. Artha is stained by secrecy. Kama is stained by excessive addiction" (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 12.123). All three must be followed in measure, and none should be made the principal goal in life.

Detachment begins in a distance created between the *karta* (one who acts) and the *karma-phala* (result of the action). In essence, philosophy of the human person within the *Gita* and the political philosophy of the ideal ruler agree that the fundamental rule to be followed while doing karma is not to have desires and attachment (*kama*) regarding the result (probable or actual) of the *karma*. In the *karma-yoga adhyaya* (3rd chapter) of *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna warns that *kama* (lust) covers up knowledge, and should be seen as the lowest of virtues that can lead to anger. Furthermore, he also asserts that a person can only find peace when one has "abandoned the fruits of action" (*Bhagavad Gita*, 1984, 5.12). The aspect of *nishkama karma* or "egoless actionless" (*Bhagavad Gita*, 1984, 3.4), is important as it ensures that the ego of the person does not attach itself to the overall agency of the action- since the sense of "I am doing it," "I did it" or "I will do it" leads to attachment to the *karma*. In chapter 2, *Sankhya Yoga*, Sri Krishna beautifully illustrates the chain of kama (desire) that leads to anger, delusion, loss of memory, lessened discrimination power, loss of intelligence and the ultimate downfall of a human being (verses 62–63). Bhishma, in the "Apad Dharma" section of the *Shanti Parva* provides the chain of evil, that is as follows:

> Greed alone is the great grasper. Evil is propagated by greed. It is from this that evil, adharma and supreme misery flow. This is the foundation for misdeeds and makes people commit sin. Anger results from greed. Desire results from greed. Confusion and delusion result from greed and so do pride, arrogance, malice and lack of forgiveness. (*Mahabharata*, 2013, p. 581)

Nishkama karma becomes a central doctrine that runs through the entirety of *Mahabharata*. In the epic, and particularly in *Gita* and *Shanti Parva*, the limits of desire, and the necessity of procuring only that which is necessary, are repeated expositions. The root cause of desire is a false sense of permanence that one associates with the "I" principle. This becomes another reigning challenge for the ruler to decipher.

Leadership as Seva

Seva or the aspect of "service" is an important element in reorienting oneself and one's primary identifications, responsibilities and actions in the context of others around him/her. For the ruler, the subjects who are governed by him/her, as well as the entirety of the surrounding for which the ruler is responsible. One important element in this regard is the recognition of one's "self" and its scope. The primary cause of all misery is the confusion between the lower self (rooted in the nature's output of body with which we get a material selfhood) and the higher self (the disembodied, immortal and eternally divine soul that goes beyond mortal bodies). Sri Krishna affirms that our duty is to upgrade our self from its lower form to the higher form by practicing the *marga* (path) of *nishkama karma* (*Bhagavad Gita*, 1984, 6.5–6) In regard to

battle and the woe of killing someone, Krishna roots the sense of killing to be done in the physical level, for the immortal Self can never be destroyed. The self that we often take as our true selves is the *jiva*, the "embodied spirit" which is enmeshed in the three *gunas* of the human body- *sattva* (pure, goodness), *rajas* (activity and passion), and *tamas* (inertia and darkness)- which determine the human behavior and subjectivity in their secular life. While Bhishma in the *raja dharma* section asserts that all three *gunas* are necessary in some proportion or another, Bhrigu highlights how *kshatriya varna* (the warrior class- who are those responsible for leadership and governance in a society) is dominated by the *rajas* quality of vigor and passion (*Mahabharata*, 2013).

In *Bhagavad Gita* and *Shanti Parva*, one witnesses the practical and rational exhortations of embracing the non-attached self in order to carry out responsibilities towards the public. A predominant theme that captured the nature of work to be done by the ruler towards those ruled by him/her, is that of *seva* with the goal of "welfare for all." In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna names *rajarishis* who were imparted the knowledge of renunciation of action (*jnana karma sanyasa*)- Vivasvan, Manu, Iksvaku as well as Janaka. This specific knowledge teaches the manner of carrying out the royal duty of a ruler, a monarch in charge of a society, but with the spirit of renunciation of the gifts and nature of the work done. The image of *loka samgraha* is brought up by Sri Krishna (*Bhagavad Gita*, 1984, 3.20) to define the "good of the world" to be aimed at by those in power. All such *rajarishis* were enlightened, non-attached but always conscious of the goal of the greater good of the world beyond I, me and mine.

This spirit of welfare for all is also talked about by Bhishma in *Shanti Parva* (*Mahabharata*, 2013), where he asserts that a proper administration of the *dandaniti* will ensure that the subjects are protected in accordance with dharma and policy (12.70); "if the lord of the earth protects, dharma is followed and there is no violence towards each other" (12.68). Throughout the "Raja Dharma" section, Bhishma reiterates that the *kshatriya* role of being the "protector of all dharmas" is necessary to ensure the world functions properly and prosperity is ensured in the society. The welfare of the state and the subject is thus a strong element in both the *Gita* and the *Shanti Parva*.

Liberation for the Worldly

Moksha or the act of liberation from the cycle of birth and death is an important element in the context of both *Bhagavad Gita* and *Shanti Parva*. In "Moksha Dharma" section of the *Shanti Parva*, aspects of austerities, truthful living, freedom from illusory sense of ownership over objects, people and roles, as well as following the supreme spirit of renunciation is strongly recommended. Emotional upheaval in all directions can be uprooted when "I dwell in the infinite that is beyond all these taints" (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 12.172). Sri Krishna has time and again elaborated on the power of *maya* (illusion of the world) which enmeshes the *atman* in the perils surrounding the mortal body. In both sections studied, the journey of discursive contemplations is aimed at understanding the aspect of leading and ruling as material roles that merge with the ultimate divine principle. While Sri Krishna revealed his Divine Cosmic form and emphasized that *saranagati* or total surrender of all that makes up the individual in the Divine is the only way to attain liberation from the sorrows and miseries of the world, Bhishma highlighted that abstention from desires and austerities ensures the attainment of divinity for any self-controlled individual (*Mahabharata*, 2013, 12.155). Dharmic action is a systematic and holistic method of preparing the self to be merged with the Brahman.

Conclusion

The paper revealed the way *Mahabharata* as an epic is an allegory of salvation; specific focus on *Shanti Parva* and *Bhagavad Gita* ensured that the method of dharma as a path to ultimate spiritual enlightenment and liberation was caricatured through the role of a leader. The material goals and hurdles attached to the role of a ruler with responsibilities, along with the personal growth as a spiritual seeker, is ensured with the basic requirement of establishing inner equilibrium within the self. Power is not just a blessing; rather, it is an opportunity to enhance life all around and contribute to the purpose of uplifting the world that all are striving hard for. Through dimensions of balance, *karma* and *karma-phala*, as well as the necessity to understand one's own spirit and individual predisposition, one can understand the dimensions and scope of dharma in a specific role. For the leader, timely and contextual performance of all duties with a dharmic approach is essential.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Water as a Landscape Element in Historic Garden: The Comparison of Mughal Garden and Japanese Garden

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Water has long been an important landscape element in garden design. Many historic gardens contain a variety of water features that provide different character and distinct atmospheres. This article seeks to explore water as a landscape element in two major historic gardens, i.e. Mughal garden and Japanese garden, through document study along with on-site observation. All the fieldwork sites are considered pleasure gardens owned by the royal family and built at the same period of time. It is found that in Mughal gardens, i.e. Shalimar Bagh and Achabal, Kashmir, settled in the mountainous terrain with slight slopes, the water character is the movement. The water body is rather small and built in geometric forms. It creates a sense of pleasure and joyfulness. Whereas in Japanese gardens, i.e. Katsura Imperial Villa and Sento Imperial Palace, Kyoto, settled in the flat terrain, the water character is static. The water body is quite large and built in organic forms. It creates a sense of peacefulness and tranquillity. Through the comparison of Mughal gardens and Japanese gardens, water can be employed in creating pleasure gardens in various ways due to its context. This observation of water in historic gardens can help to better understand the application and effectiveness of water in landscape design.

Keywords: historic garden, water, landscape element, Mughal garden, Japanese garden

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Introduction

Water is an important element in landscape design. Landscape architectural design involves the use of various elements such as plantings, water, rocks, landforms, structures, sculptures, and other decorations (Arayanimitsakul, 2015). Water has been used as a landscape element in various ideas and forms (He, 2023). It has a very special quality as a quintessential element in garden design and holds immense aesthetic and symbolic significance (He, 2023; Whalley, 1988). Aesthetic factors in landscape architectural design consist of natural features and spatial pattern. Water is a natural feature that contains specific beauty, provides pleasure, serves as a focal point and landmark, aids in perception and memory, and sets orientation (Arayanimitsakul, 2015). Water has contributed to creating a significant character of many historic gardens. Pleasure gardens were built in which water, so vital for irrigation, became a major element in landscape design (Paul & Rees, 1986). Over many centuries and in many countries, water has been acknowledged and exploited. It has inspired and been a great provider not only in physical terms, but also in aesthetic qualities. Water has contributed to both natural and man-made environments (Whalley, 1988). The graceful interplay of water bodies, such as ponds, streams, and cascades, becomes a canvas for examining how each culture crafts its water features to evoke emotions and harmonise with the surrounding landscape (He, 2023).

In terms of historic garden, there are two major garden styles in the Eastern World; the Persian garden, and the Chinese garden. The Mughal garden, situated in South Asia, derives from the Persian and Islamic gardens in the Middle East, while the Japanese garden comes from the Chinese garden in the East. Undoubtedly, water is a key element in both gardens. He (2023) mentions that East Asian garden design places a great deal of emphasis on water sceneries, which influence both the aesthetic appeal and the emotional resonance of these landscapes. This study, therefore, intends to compare the use of water as a landscape element in those two types of historical gardens. It is stated that a comparative study is an analytical approach that examines uniformities and differences across multiple geographic areas, often involving the comparison of various countries or the tracing of a phenomenon across different contexts using a common conceptual and analytic framework (Comparative Study, 2026). Moreover, comparing the water scenes in the two gardens involves an exploration of their expression modes, design techniques, and underlying purposes (He, 2023).

This study aims to investigate the use of water in historic gardens in the Eastern World; the Mughal garden and the Japanese garden. There are two objectives: (1) to study and collect information on the use of water as a landscape element in the historic gardens and (2) to explore the design and effectiveness of water in the garden landscape. This is a comparative study employing qualitative research using secondary data in conjunction with field surveys. The fieldwork sites are selected by sampling-based methods, focusing on the Mughal garden and the Japanese garden that were built at the same time (1615-1630). Purposive sampling is applied by selecting historic gardens, which are a pleasure garden situated in the palace, summer palace, and/or the royal villa. They are Shalimar Bagh and Achabal in Kashmir, and Katsura Imperial Villa and Sento Imperial Palace in Kyoto. The data analysis applies the framework of landscape architectural design to compare the character and expression of water among those gardens. Aiming to identify the variation of water elements in the garden design.

Water in the Mughal Garden

A review of water in Mughal garden indicates that Mughal love of gardens and symbolism as well as their art of gardening was inherited from Persia (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). The Persian garden in which water plays a primordial role is typically a charbagh, four-quartered gardens divided by four channels of water (symbolising the four rivers of life) flanked by paved causeways (Alkazi, 2014; Castel-branco, 2011). The enclosed garden is also a Persian concept, and is described as being similar to the garden of paradise. Paradise is seen in Islamic religious scriptures as being a garden with streams. Islamic gardening celebrates the interplay of water and greenery. Therefore, a spirit of harmony between the natural and the man-made pervades the Mughal gardens (Alkazi, 2014).

Water is a major element of Mughal garden design, both still and in motion, for seeing and hearing. It also plays a major function: irrigating and cooling the garden (Alkazi, 2014). Water is a vital necessity to cool the dwelling rooms, supply the baths, and irrigate these immense terraced enclosures (Stuart, 2009). It is used in different forms, whether as canals or jets of water, waterfalls, cascades, ponds or lakes. Canals and ponds are constructed to keep the water brimming to the level of the paths on either side (Alkazi, 2014).

The Mughals traditions laid most stress on the choice of site (Stuart, 2009). They set foot in Kashmir in the 16th century (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). During the hot Indian summers, the emperors and their courts moved to the Vale of Kashmir. The greatest source of beauty is their setting – lofty mountains descending to a fertile green valley (Berrall, 1978). The scene was transformed into a Mughal pleasure landscape of water. Gardens were set mainly on the lower slopes of the enclosing mountains, luscious with streams. The valley plain is surrounded by mountains and situated Lake Dal. The gardens were sited between the mountains and the lake, to catch the water flow (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). The undulating landscape and the endless supply of water from running streams and mountain springs introduced two new dimensions into the Mughal garden; terrace garden and water garden. The gardens and pavilions were located on gradually ascending levels with the cascades, the central water chutes, and flowing channels. The water was channelled into rectangular ponds, where jets cast it into the air. Pavilions were often built across the ponds, so that icy water flowed under as well as around them to keep the marble floors cool (Alkazi, 2014; Berrall, 1978; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010).

Shalimar Bagh and Achabal are amongst the very few surviving authentic Mughal gardens that were developed for pleasure, enjoyment and also for holding Court (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). All the finest Mughal gardens are found in beautiful situations, centring round a hillside spring, or built across a narrow ravine or valley through which a constant stream of water flows (Stuart, 2009). There is a central water channel, which forms the central visual axis of the garden, enhanced by avenues of poplars or chinar trees. There are pavilions with a central open space placed over these water channels which cascade down from one terrace to another in the form of falls, where they fill the larger water pond with an array of fountains. Finally, the water from the central channel joins a water body, either a flowing stream nearby (Achabal), or a lake (Shalimar Bagh) (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010).

Shalimar Bagh

Shalimar Bagh, the most famous garden of Kashmir (Berrall, 1978), is situated between the Himalayas and Lake Dal. The site was chosen by Emperor Jahangir around 1620, who conceptualised the layout of the gardens and his son, Shah Jahan, collaborated with him on the design and oversaw the construction (Alkazi, 2014; Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987; Stuart, 2009; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). Shalimar was developed along the lines of the traditional charbagh concept (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). The plan was mathematical and symbolic. Each terrace garden was levelled to fit the sloping site and each of the fourfold parts was modelled for irrigation (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). The garden was arranged in a series of five terraces rising one above the other that make up two and a half charbaghs (Alkazi, 2014; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). It was divided into two major parts. The lower portion, comprising the first three terraces, was where the emperor held a public audience. The upper two terraces, the Zenana, were exclusively for the emperor and his courtiers. These two parts were screened by a thick masonry wall having two similar gateways at each side of the water channel (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010).

Figure 1

Layout of Shalimar Bagh Shows Water Bodies



Note. Revised from www.google.co.th/maps

The present size of the garden measures approximately 594 x 250 metre (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). The enclosed garden is shaded by chenar trees and patterned with colourful flower beds. It is divided into three separate parts; the outer garden, the central or Emperor's garden, and the inner garden for the Empress and her court. The outer or public garden, starting with the grand canal leading from the lake, terminates at the first pavilion

(Hall of Public Audience) standing over the waterfall in the centre of the canal, which flows through the building into the pond below. The second garden is slightly broader, consisting of two shallow terraces with the Hall of Private Audience in the centre. The inner garden is dominated by the black marble pavilion built in a large shallow pond which stands in the midst of its spray fountain and surrounded by a series of cascades (Berrall, 1978; Stuart, 2009). A line of ponds is placed symmetrically down the middle of these terraces and connected by a canal. The water comes from a branch of the spring and enters at the upper end, flows through each successive terrace in beautiful stone chutes, leading to the pond below that contains numerous fountains (Alkazi, 2014). The fountains were fed by gravity (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). The whole of Shalimar is animated by the sound of water rippling down the chutes or ruffling the surfaces of the ponds after splashing out of hundreds of fountain jets (Berrall, 1978).

Figure 2
Shalimar Bagh

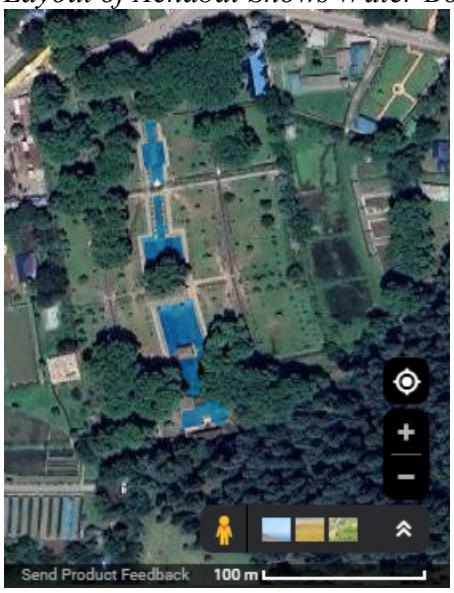


Note. Source: Author

Achabal

The royal garden of Achabal is located near Anantnag predates the arrival of the Mughals in Kashmir. The present garden was laid by Empress Nur Jahan in 1620. The garden is trapezoidal in shape with an area of around 9.7 acres and follows the traditional charbagh concept (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). The plan varied the water proportions but kept to the principle of a central thread passing through buildings (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). Achabal is developed on the base of a forested mountain around a natural spring. The pre-existing garden was greatly enhanced and rearranged by the Empress and consisted of four gently ascending terrace levels (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010). The garden is very handsome, laid out in regular walks, and full of fruit trees (Stuart, 2009).

Figure 3
Layout of Achabal Shows Water Bodies



Note. Revised from www.google.co.th/maps

The central feature of the garden is the spring that strongly gushes out of the earth and the water is so abundant and cool. The spring feeds the entire garden for its irrigation as well as aesthetic needs. The water is collected and dispersed throughout the gardens in the form of a canal, branch canals, and ponds. Fountains and jets are in various forms and fishponds are in great numbers. There is a lofty cascade which in its fall takes the form of a large sheet. Pavilions and platforms, with airy latticed windows and carved flower-bell corbels, were built over the water channel. The pavilion set in the pond just beneath the waterfall is planned for the noontide rest, lulled by the sound of the cascade, cooled by the driving spray. The garden is shaded by chenars and other full-grown trees with a natural landscape background (Stuart, 2009; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010).

Figure 4
Achabal





Note. Source: Author

A survey of both Mughal gardens reveals that water is used and arranged as a major element of the gardens. There is always sight, sound, and touch of water throughout the garden. Water creates the sense of visual, auditory, and tactile sensory. It is strategically placed along the central axis of the garden area, manifesting in various forms including waterfalls, cascades, ponds, canals, fountains, jets. Water also serves as a spatial link, interlocking with architecture, whether flowing through or around the buildings, as well as waterside walkways and water crossings in the form of bridges and stepping stones. The water body is rather small and built in geometric forms with a paved stone surface and border. Some areas have some drops of water on the surface, sometimes with splashes of mist, creating a fresh and pleasant atmosphere. The water character is abundant and lively movement. It creates a sense of pleasure and joyfulness.

Water in the Japanese Garden

A review of water in Japanese garden indicates that the art of garden making was imported to Japan from China (Berrall, 1978; Hyams, 1971). It was transformed to the Japanese taste and to give expression to their own philosophy and religion (Hyams, 1971). The garden has been looked upon as a part of the yearning for nature. It has become a necessity of life, both for its physical beauty and mental and spiritual uplift (Berrall, 1978). Garden making was one of the fine arts and the Japanese carried the art further into the realm of the abstract (Hyams, 1971). The Japanese garden is created not merely as a place of beauty but as a place of peace and rest, a fitting abode in which the soul can find nourishment (Berrall, 1978).

One of the Japanese garden styles consists mainly of water and has been made in varying sizes. Lakes and ponds play such a very important part in garden design (Berrall, 1978). The garden was laid out with the pond as the main feature (Hyams, 1971). The gardens of ancient Japan seem to have been a lake with an island and bridges (Berrall, 1978). One of the symbolic elements in the Japanese garden is an island, shaped like a tortoise and inhabited by tortoises, cranes and immortal beings. It is auspicious and favourable to longevity (Hyams, 1971). Garden lakes usually have islands. They vary in form and character (Berrall, 1978), and are frequently represented in the form of crane-shaped ponds with tortoise-shaped islands (Hyams, 1971). It is always planted with pine trees and signifies longevity (Berrall, 1978). Sometimes water is meant to appear as big as an ocean; others represent rivers, lakes, or swamps. With the aid of trees and plants, they are curved so as not to let their full extent be seen from any one position. In the construction of the banks, some parts are arranged with rocks, others with posts and still, others with turf coming to the edge of the water. In certain places, stone steps lead down to the water (Berrall, 1978).

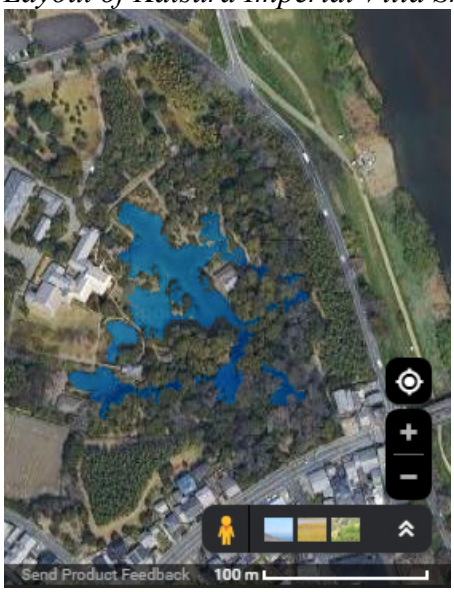
The Japanese Garden is a stroll garden (Imperial Household Agency, 2019). The stroll garden has been so called to suggest a landscape in which the observer or participant is in movement (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). During the Edo period from I605 to 1867 (Kyoto was a cultural, artistic, and traditional capital with the presence of the imperial family), one of the garden styles is based on a lake with paths all round and vantage points or belvederes to view it as a series of pictures (Hyams, 1971). There is a walking path that encircles the lake. The lake is large and located in the middle of the garden area with the edge curving naturally. The water is still and reflects the sky. The pond is also composed of various types of bridges, islets, shores, and the water's edge curves and traverses. It gives a different visual experience while walking through the garden (Imperial Household Agency, 2019). Endless details as to the placing of rocks or planting of trees must be carefully thought out in order that different parts of the garden may be admired from varying angles (Berrall, 1978).

Katsura Imperial Villa

The last quarter of the 16th century, a number of famous gardens were created in Kyoto. One of the masterpieces is the garden of the Katsura Imperial Villa (Berrall, 1978). The construction was commissioned by the younger brother of Emperor Goyozei, Prince Toshihito, and was completed in 1615. Then, the villa fell into disrepair through a decade of disuse following Prince Toshihito's demise. Later on, Prince Toshihito's son, Prince Toshitada restored and expanded the villa by around 1662. Prince Toshitada also made improvements to existing ponds and gardens. The total area of the Katsura Imperial Villa is approximately 69,000 square metres (17 acres) (Imperial Household Agency, 2019). It is said to have been undertaken by the master Kobori Enshu on three conditions: no limitation as to time of completion, no interference, and no limit on expenditure (Berrall, 1978).

Figure 5

Layout of Katsura Imperial Villa Shows Water Bodies



Note. Revised from www.google.co.th/maps

In the middle of the villa's grounds, there is a lake with an intricate shoreline and there are five artificial islets of various sizes over which there are bridges made of earth, wood and stones, as well as a boat mooring. There is also a garden, with lanterns and wash basins in appropriate locations, with pathways laid out in a circuit for strolling (Imperial Household Agency, 2019). The path of stones circuits the garden from and to the villa. The garden is

traditional and at least two ancient symbols (both of longevity) survive in the land forms: the tortoise-shaped island and the flying crane-shaped lake in which it is set (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). The walk through the garden is one that constantly surprises the visitor with its clever design – at times the pond disappears entirely from view, only to return in a panoramic vista, with the path itself leading the visitor from the waterside to elevated positions (Imperial Household Agency, 2019).

Figure 6

Katsura Imperial Villa



Note. Source: Author

Sento Imperial Palace

The Sento Imperial Palace served as a residence for the retired Emperor. It was built in 1630 as a Palace for the retired Emperor Gomizunō. The garden with a vast courtyard was created by the most well-known artist of the era, Kobori Enshu (1579-1647). The Sento Imperial Palace encompasses approximately 75,000 square metres (18 acres) and is surrounded by an earthen wall with coping tiles. There are a vast garden and two ponds, the North Pond and South Pond, which are located along a north-south axis. Upon leaving the palace from the side gate, the entire view of the North Pond comes into sight. The islet, situated to the east of the pond, adds a depth of perspective to the view as seen from the west. In the South Pond, there are two islets, offering a clear contrast that results from the differing forms of the bridges, trees, boulders, and the teahouse. The different styles of bridges: the bridge covered with wisteria, the stone bridge, and the arched bridge, contribute to the visual contrast (Imperial Household Agency, 2019b).

Figure 7
Layout of Sento Imperial Palace Shows Water Bodies



Note. Revised from www.google.co.th/maps

The artist designed all gardens according to fixed principles, but within these there was scope for individual originality. The Sento Imperial Palace gardens were made soon after Katsura and, although apparently similar, are different in feeling. They seem less tender and more sophisticated, as suggested in the view over the bridge towards the tea pavilion. Kobori Enshu's materials, such as the flat-topped stones, were traditional (Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). An innovation was the long beach that was laid out from the shoreline into the pond, where every flat and oval pebble was individually chosen (Imperial Household Agency, 2019b; Jellicoe & Jellicoe, 1987). The view from the teahouse looking to the South Pond is one of the most renowned spots in all the palace grounds (Imperial Household Agency, 2019b).

Figure 8
Sento Imperial Palace





Note. Source: Author

A survey of both Japanese gardens reveals that water is used in the form of large ponds or lakes in the centre of the garden with a sophisticated layout and natural landscape surroundings. There are islands, islets, bridges, aquatic vegetation, and riparian vegetation. The garden path winds around the pond, creating diverse perspectives; sometimes close to the water, sometimes further away, and sometimes the water is not even visible. Other landscape elements are used in conjunction with water, including trees, pebble beaches, rocks, stone lanterns, pavilions, tea houses, and bridges of various styles made of wood, stone, and earth. The water body is quite large and built in organic forms with natural materials. The riverbank area features grassy hills, pebble beaches, rocks, trees, and gardens, all of which are natural elements. Overall, the water character is static and serene, reflecting the sky and the trees. It creates a sense of peacefulness and tranquillity.

Conclusion

The study entitled “Water as a Landscape Element in Historic Garden: The Comparison of Mughal Garden and Japanese Garden” contains two objectives: (1) to study and collect information on the use of water as a landscape element in the historic gardens and (2) to explore the design and effectiveness of water in the garden landscape. The study reveals that water has been utilised as a major landscape element in gardening to create space for pleasure. Water features have been created in a wide variety of forms, sizes, and materials. Water is an element that creates beauty, stimulates a sensory experience: vision; hearing; touch, shapes the surrounding space, and provides a certain atmosphere. Water is sometimes combined with other elements such as pavilions, bridges, paths, plants, rocks, etc. Furthermore, water serves as a symbolic representation of different meanings across cultures. In terms of the design and effectiveness of water, the expression and effect of water depend on the design. Regarding the Mughal gardens situated on the sloping hillsides, small geometric ponds and waterways are used along with the flowing water. The vibrant and lively atmosphere is created with the sound of flowing water and splashing spray. In case of the Japanese gardens, while flat terrain is common, large, naturally shaped lakes or ponds and islets meander through the garden area. The still water creates a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere. The lakes are appreciated from various viewpoints alongside other natural elements, e.g. rocks, pebbles, plants. The comparison of water in the Mughal garden and the Japanese garden is summarised in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1
The Comparison of Water in the Mughal Garden and the Japanese Garden

	Design	Perception	Character	Expression	Effectiveness
Mughal garden	hardscape, geometric, small	sight, sound, touch	movement	diverse, delight	Garden of pleasure with sense of freshness and joyfulness
Japanese garden	softscape, organic, large	sight from various spots	static	uniform, serene	Garden of contemplation with sense of tranquillity and peacefulness

According to He (2023) by comparing two gardens, which capture the distinctiveness of each tradition, common aesthetic values and a variety of design philosophies are discovered. The findings suggest that through the comparison of Mughal gardens and Japanese gardens, water can be used in creating pleasure gardens in various ways due to its context, e.g. geography, culture, beliefs, techniques, materials, which is consistent with contextualism theory; a garden's beauty is influenced by its cultural and environmental context (Fenner & Fenner, 2024; Hosseini et al., 2024; Olivadese & Dindo, 2022). Water is fluid, so it depends on the body or container as well as the adjoining elements and surrounding environment. The landscape design shapes the expression and effectiveness of water, as demonstrated in Mughal gardens and Japanese gardens, which show different ways of employing water that stimulates sense and perception through sensory experience. Numerous studies on sensory experience and sensory landscape have indicated that garden provides multisensory experiences, e.g. visual delights, sound of running water, touch of splashing water, kinetic sense of moving in and through a space, thus contributing to aesthetic pleasure. Garden also evokes thought and feeling as well as carries certain associations (Ross, 1998; Ross, 2002; Sarmadi et al., 2020; Wagenfeld & Singley, 2016). This investigation of water features in historic gardens identifies the design and expression of water and consequently dedicates to better understanding the application and effectiveness of water in landscape design which could be adopted in contemporary work.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Comments as Part of the Dissemination of Disinformation Discourse

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The virality of conspiracy content depends not only on the activity and communicative skill of the author but also on the responsiveness of the audience. Recipients may react to conspiracy narratives critically, yet also with strong conviction about their truthfulness and a desire to share their stance further. This paper focuses on the position of the recipient and their attitude toward shared conspiracy content, particularly within the realm of comments posted under such content. It examines the character, linguistic form, and communicative functions of these comments. Based on the identification of linguistic action frameworks in the sense of speech act theory, the study distinguishes various recipient roles in the dissemination of conspiracy content – from passive recipients without emotional involvement, through active recipients and sharers of personal opinions, to agitators encouraging others to take action. The empirical analysis draws on a corpus of comments responding to conspiracy-related content in German and Slovak. It aims to identify the types of linguistic actions (*Handlungsräume*) that these comments represent and to explore the linguistic strategies employed in their formulation (neutral and expressive means across different language levels). The findings may contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of recipients in spreading conspiracy content and to revealing the motives that shape this process.

Keywords: conspiracy content, disinformation content, social media, comments, speech act theory

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Introduction

The digital age, with its almost limitless access to a wide variety of content and the open space it provides for self-expression, has brought many benefits but also risks related to the issues of truthfulness, appropriateness, and the safety of available content in a broader context. The activity of the individual—the content author—has, in many cases, become more dynamic as a result of perceived anonymity in the online world and a certain lack of consideration regarding the potential impact of shared content. Nonetheless, in the context of online communication, verbal and visual means are equally significant as they are in face-to-face communication. Indeed, in certain cases, the consequences can be far more serious.

The present study focuses on one type of such content, specifically conspiracy content shared on digital platforms or social media. The primary focus of this study is not on the verbalisation and/or visualisation of the content itself, but rather on the reactions to it in the form of comments. Nevertheless, comments are reactions which, by their very nature, require a stimulus. It is therefore not possible to adequately comprehend a comment in isolation; it is inextricably linked to its initial impulse.

Comments are an extremely interesting object of study, given their potential to significantly influence the virality of conspiracy content, particularly when they are positive in nature. This phenomenon can contribute to the development of a broader base of sympathisers. Conversely, these interactions can also engender adverse tension or even aggression in the digital sphere. Furthermore, these interactions are characterised by the transmission of information regarding specific personality traits, psychological dispositions, and value and political orientations, which the author, often unconsciously, imbues into every interaction. However, in relation to the specified aspects of the study, it is relevant to acknowledge that this is a distinct communicative format which, through verbal and visual means, delineates its own scope of action (German: Handlungsraum). It is precisely within this scope that the author's specific functional strategy is realised. The focus of this study is therefore the functional and formal aspects of the comments, whilst concentrating on the way in which primarily verbal means shape the resulting communicative act.

Theoretically, the basis of our understanding is the concept of the communicative act as a speech act, in which the relationship between language and action plays a central role. This understanding is reflected in the utilisation of linguistic units or signs in close connection with a determining situational context, as a result of which they enter into various syntagmatic relationships with other linguistic units and form more complex structures. The determining situational context encompasses, on the one hand, the relevant segment of extra-linguistic reality, and on the other hand, the author's position together with their intentions embedded in the structuring of the resulting communicative product. In accordance with Bühler's Organon model (1934), these intentions can be interpreted through the three basic semantic functions (Darstellungs-, Ausdrucks- and Appellfunktion; Bühler, 1976, pp. 94–117). Linguistic signs or symbols, therefore, do not appear in isolation, nor do they exist in a polysemous dimension on their own, but, in Searl's words (2010, p. 175), they are part of the final product, the production of which aims to realise a speech act, necessarily integrating the author's intentions. These are reflected in the verbal and/or visual representation of the final product. From the perspective of speech act theory, it is therefore important in the context of the issue under consideration to examine two components: propositional content (Searle, 1969) or the locutionary act (Austin, 1962) and illocution or the illocutionary act (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Whereas the locutionary act (referred to as propositional content in Searle, 1969) represents "the production of a meaningful linguistic expression", the illocutionary act determines the nature and force of the speaker's intention (Huang, 2007, p. 102). Searle (1975) categorises these into five basic classes of illocutionary acts: representatives or assertives, commissives, directives, declaratives, and expressives (Krämer, 2001, pp. 66–67; Meibauer, 2001, pp. 94–96; Searle, 1975, pp. 350–351). According to them, representatives (assertives) are closely linked to the truth of a proposition that the author believes or is convinced of. Commissives represent an act of communication to an intended future action. Directives are oriented towards the addressee in the sense of a commitment to carry out certain actions in response to a call, request, or demand. Declaratives are linked to specific institutions, and their utterance brings about a change in reality. Expressives are closely linked to the speaker's current psychological experience, which they share when uttering the statement. Some speech acts can be directly linked to the linguistic functions in Bühler's Organon model (1934) (see above): representatives (assertives)/Darstellungsfunktion, expressives/Ausdrucksfunktion, directives/Appellfunktion. Finally, it is important to note that commissive acts can also function as indirect directives, corresponding to the appellative function.

In addition to the aforementioned classification of direct speech acts, it is also worth mentioning indirect speech acts, particularly when assessing the nature of the empirical basis. By an indirect speech act, it is meant an act in which, in relation to the contextual/situational framework, the illocutionary intention represented by the linguistic form of the utterance is neutralised for the purpose of realising another illocutionary intention (Krämer, 2001, pp. 69–70; Meibauer, 2001, pp. 108–109). In the context of comments as reactive acts, it is necessary to consider their close connection to the original contribution or previous discussion, as this creates their meaning.

The following analysis is based on the key elements mentioned above: the functional understanding of language according to Bühler (1934) and the pragmatic nature of communication in the context of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975). By examining the functional and formal aspects of the comment(s), we consider the role of the addressee (from the perspective of the perception of certain conspiratorial content) and, simultaneously, the author (from the perspective of the production of the communicative product – comment) in the dissemination of conspiratorial content. We believe that comments play an important role in this regard, and that their nature is also significant. The nature of a specific comment can significantly contribute to the establishment of conspiratorial content.

Comments as a Tool of Conspiracy Discourse: An Empirical Analysis

The analytical part of the study focuses on examining a selected set of German and Slovak comments about the following aspects:

- The verbal and/or visual elements of the content shared in the comment(s), including the expressiveness and the positive and negative connotation of the linguistic units; and the role of visual elements such as emojis, graphically highlighted punctuation, etc. The components in question are those that are located within the area of locution.
- The fulfilment of the communicative function is achieved through the analysis of comments concerning their communicative intent, which falls within the domain of illocution.

Although we can grasp the verbal aspect in isolation and categorise it descriptively based on the affiliation of linguistic units to stylistic layers of vocabulary, their use in a specific

communicative context is crucial. The analysis, therefore, proceeds in parallel with both aspects. In order to illustrate the key findings, the focus will be on two types of examples: firstly, those that are exemplary and secondly, those that may appear insignificant at first glance, yet carry considerably more weight.

The German-language comments originate from the social network Facebook and relate to posts shared within the publicly accessible Facebook group *Zeit für Aufarbeitung* (n.d.). This Facebook group disseminates content that is visible to everyone, and anyone can comment on it. The group's administrator is Helmut Egel, who is responsible for most of the posts. The total number of (German) comments analysed is 649, with a proportion consisting of replies to previously shared comments. The comments also include those by the administrator, which are usually posted first and serve to supplement the shared posts. The Slovak empirical data set consists of 243 comments, some of which are direct replies to existing comments. In consideration of the disparate scope of the German and Slovak empirical data sets, it is imperative to emphasise that the objective of the study is not a statistical comparison of quantitative parameters, but rather an examination of the qualitative aspect of the comments as acts of reaction within two distinct linguistic and cultural environments. The distinction between the two lies not only in the quantity of the data but also in the stimulus. In the Slovak case, there are comments on a single source post in the form of a video recording. The video originates from the YouTube channel BS - B Spiritual (n.d.), and, akin to the German material, is publicly accessible to a considerable user base. It is important to note that all analysed comments have been anonymised, in accordance with ethical principles in the digital space and because they are not relevant for linguistic analysis. The texts are presented in their original form, including any grammatical, stylistic, or punctuation errors. These errors are not viewed in a negative light, as they are considered to be an inherent part of the communication environment under investigation.

German Conspiracy Discourse

The German empirical corpus, consisting of over 600 comments, appears to be relatively homogeneous in terms of opinion. A thorough examination of the entire sample revealed no comment that expressed a counter-position to the original post or to other comments. This fact, which is important for the analysis, allows conclusions to be drawn about the nature of the communicative acts carried out through the comments. The comments thus establish a communicative environment in which speech acts do not serve to exchange counter-opinions or explicitly construct opposing viewpoints. The fulfilment of their function is evident in the sharing of attitudes and the discussion of the topics raised, which, however, is primarily directed towards the cooperative affirmation of group identity. This affirmation of identity manifests in various forms; through our analysis, we have identified the following dominant types.

Assertives are a category of verbs that typically take the form of the German verb *behaupten* (to assert). The use of assertives reflects the speaker's belief in the truth of the presented statement. This conviction, or belief, can be expressed in a variety of ways, as is evident in the formal aspects of several comments. The verb *behaupten* (to assert) and other verbs with a similar function (*feststellen*/ to state, *konstatieren*/ to state, *andeuten*/ to imply, etc.) appear only in a few of the comments, as assertives are predominantly realised directly. In relation to this, however, it is also important to emphasise another key finding: conspiracy discourse is not about ordinary factual statements of reality (in the sense of scientifically or empirically verified claims), but about the affirmation of shared content, and thus a shared reality. This

phenomenon is directly associated with the presence of an expressive charge of varying intensity, which can occasionally manifest as particularly dominant. Alternatively, it may be linked to the formulation of calls to action, typically directed towards combating an "enemy". While comments may formally exhibit the characteristics of assertions, they frequently function secondarily as expressions or directives. The following figures illustrate the diversity of assertives in conspiracy discourse. These include a Facebook post and a selection of comments, along with a translation.

Figure 1

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Comments



[redacted] 31. január 2023 ·

‼️ DJOKER GEWINNT IM LAND DES IMPFFASCHISMUS SEINEN 22. GRANDSLAM-TITEL 💯

⛔ Wahnsinn: Letztes Jahr durfte Djokovic noch nicht einmal nach Australien einreisen! Aufgrund seiner fehlenden Corona-Impfung wurde ihm die Einreise auf den Insel-Kontinent verweigert.

✅ Welche Genugtuung für diesen Helden und Botschafter einer aufgeklärten und standhaften Gesellschaft!

Comments

[redacted]

Einfach toll, ich vergönne ihm den Titel so 👍👍👍 einer der wenigen Sportler der diesem Wahnsinn standgehalten hat. [C1]

(That's just great, I'm happy for him to win the title 👍👍👍 He's one of the few athletes who has weathered this madness)

[redacted]

Der Richtige hat gewonnen ich wünsche ihm noch viele Titel [C2]
(The right man has won; I wish him many more titles)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Anonymný účastník, 2023)

The initial figure comprises two comments and illustrates an assertive statement that is characterised by a relatively low degree of expressiveness. In both cases, the comments corroborate the content disseminated in the post (see Fig. 1) without the deliberate utilisation of negative linguistic elements. Despite the incorporation of the noun *dieser Wahnsinn* in the initial comment [C1], which already possesses an inherent negative connotation at the lexical level, it does not accurately reflect the author's current emotional state. In this context, the term functions as a collective designation for the pandemic and the associated measures in their entirety. In comments [C1] and [C2], a glorifying style of affirming a shared reality is observable, in which an individual's sporting victory is transformed into a moral victory for the group (and like-minded individuals). It is interesting to observe how, based on his stance on vaccination, the athlete becomes a symbol of exceptionality and righteousness, thereby implicitly integrating them into the group of pandemic opponents. In comment [C1], the verbal component is supplemented by a visual symbol – an emoji of approval. This is a visual means of explicitly expressing approval, which corresponds to a positive evaluation of the subject.

Figure 2

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Comments



28. januar 2023 ·

⁉️Worauf warten? Beseitigen Sie ALLE Corona-Schikanen SOFORT, Herr Rauch!

📌Am Wochenende preschten Rauch und Nehammer plötzlich mit der Erkenntnis vor, dass die aktuelle Lage es zulasse, die Corona-Regeln im Laufe des Jahres abzuschaffen. Es ist eine Einsicht, die reichlich spät kommt. Auf lästige Kritik der Opposition und der MFG welche dies bereits seit geraumer Zeit forderten, hörten die abgehobenen schwarz-grünen Politiker nicht.

📌Corona-Regeln waren zu lange Selbstzweck

... Zobrazit viac

Comments

Was können wir aufarbeiten? Wir bekommen jetzt die Resultate der aufgezwungen Impfung. Und alle "Querdenker" bekommen jetzt wohl doch recht. [C1]
(What can we learn from this? We are now seeing the consequences of the mandatory vaccination. And it seems all the 'sceptics' were right after all.)

Eine Entschuldigung wird's niemals geben, desgleichen auch keine Aufarbeitung - die Bevölkerung wird längst mit Energiekrise, Inflation und dem Klima darüber hinweg getäuscht [C2]
(There won't be any apologies, and there won't be any attempt to deal with the past either. The public has been distracted by the energy crisis, inflation and climate change for a long time)

Wovon sprecht ihr eigentlich? Es sterben Menschen, weil die 3 G Regeln in den Spitälern und bei den Àrzten immer noch aufrecht sind! [C3]
(What on earth are you talking about? People are dying because the 3G rules are still in place in hospitals and at doctors' surgeries!)

Stimmt und die ungeimpften sind ja auch schon Schuld das zu wenig aufgeklärt wurde [C4]
(You're right, and it's the unvaccinated people who are to blame for the lack of info)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023a)

Figure 2 consists of a set of four comments, each representing an assertion in a different variation. Comments [C1] and [C3] both begin with a rhetorical question, a feature that is relatively common in conspiracy discourse. In both cases, the subsequent statements provide moral confirmation of the implicit answer by discussing the consequences of pandemic measures. The consequences are not specified in detail in the first comment [C1], but the opinion is anchored through the participial attribute *aufgezwungen* (in the phrase *die Resultate der aufgezwungenen Impfung*). The verb *aufzwingen* (to force/to impose), the source of this attribute, has a causative meaning and includes the idea of coercion or violence. It reflects an action in which something is forced upon someone against their will. The attribute *aufgezwungen* functions here as a referential carrier of the negative perception of vaccination and as a confirmation of the predictions of "dissidents" *("Querdenker")*. In comment [C3], the consequences are explicitly named as a process unfolding over time: *Es sterben Menschen, [...].* The second comment [C2] is relatively restrained in terms of the verbal means employed. However, it is the pragmatic potential of this term that is of particular interest. This potential is concentrated in the verb *hinwegtäuschen* (to mislead), resulting in topics such as the energy crisis, inflation, or climate being imbued with a false connotation or interpreted as conspiracies. In terms of illocutionary intent, the final remark is the most noteworthy. Although it is formally an assertive verb, the verb *stimmt* (which explicitly agrees) takes on a strongly ironic tone in the given context. Rather than presenting the guilt of the unvaccinated as a fact, it deliberately mocks the official narrative. The function's purpose is not to confirm the shared content, but to mock it. The formal assertive is functionally transformed into an expressive one.

Figure 3

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Comments



13. marec 2023 ·

Eine durchaus berechtigte Frage??

Comments

Diese Konformität ist leider auch auf Seiten der Justiz zu erkennen. Das bedeutet nur, dass öffensichtlich Mainstream-Medien, wie auch gewisse Kreise der Justiz, nichts als willfährige Erfüllungsgehilfen eines antidemokratischen bürgerfeindlichen diktatorischen politischen Systems sind. [C1]
(Unfortunately, this conformity is also evident within the judiciary. This just means that the mainstream media, and some parts of the legal system, are basically working together to keep things going in a way that's not very democratic or friendly towards citizens.)

Da die Mainstremmedien alle gleichgeschaltet und regierungskonform sind, ist es wohl kein Wunder, daß von denen, das niemand fordert. [C2]
(The mainstream media are all in lockstep and toe the government line, so it's hardly surprising that nobody demands anything of them.)

Die Hand, die einen füttert, beißt man nicht Eventuell deswegen?! [C3]
(You shouldn't bite the hand that feeds you. Maybe that's why!)

Bei der ehrenwerten Gesellschaft tritt auch keiner zurück, Vorbild ?? [C4]
(In that community, no one ever steps down either – is he a role model??)

Wir werden von Idioten regiert
Schamloser denn je!
Die hängen alle am selben Trog und decken sich selber!!!
Da kann der Bürger nur ratlos und kopfschüttelnd zusehen
Der Staat und seine Institutionen ist zum Spielball und Selbstbedienungsladen der Politiker und ihrer Erfüllungsgehilfen geworden [C5]
(We are being ruled by idiots
More shameless than ever!
They're all feeding from the same trough and looking out for themselves!!!
All the public can do is watch, helpless and shaking their heads
The state and its institutions have become a plaything and a self-service shop for politicians and their henchmen)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023b)

In relation to the third figure, five comments were selected to illustrate the aspects not previously described and to reveal further possibilities for the use of assertives. The variability observed is closely associated with the selection of linguistic means employed in both their primary and metaphorical meanings, with all the analysed comments tending towards the verbalisation of an identical negative attitude towards the mainstream media, the government, or state institutions. The common denominator in these cases is an attempt at the discursive delegitimisation of the system.

The initial comment [C1] is essential in relation to the post and the subsequent discussion. It explicitly references the situation described in the post, developing it within a broader conspiracy context. The concept of *Konformität* (adaptability, conformity) allows any social entity to be integrated into the narrative of "systemic elites". The comment in question refers to the judiciary, which, in its role as the so-called *willfährige Erfüllungsgehilfen eines antidemokratischen bürgerfeindlichen diktatorischen politischen Systems*, loses its character

as an independent institution and becomes part of the "systemic plan". This designation is a lexical accumulation of negatively connoted units, which multiplies the negative pragmatic charge and makes it seem more urgent. The concept of conformity is also used in comment [C2], specifically as part of the compound *regierungskonform*. While this compound carries an explicit ideological connotation, the participle *gleichgeschaltet* also plays an important role in its predicative function. The lexicographical description of the verb *gleichschalten* reveals both a National Socialist connotation and a more general meaning of forced alignment under system pressure (DWDS, n.d.-a, "gleichschalten").

Comment [C3] is based on paremiology. The idiom *Die Hand, die einen füttert, beißt man nicht* is a metaphorical confirmation of the alleged corruption of the media. Thanks to the widespread familiarity of this folk wisdom, no further evidence is required to contextualise the meaning for the addressee. The following question *Eventuell deswegen?!* serves as a rhetorical question leading to an unambiguous, predetermined answer.

Comment [C4] shares the metaphorical nature of the previous comment, specifically through the figurative meaning of the phrase *ehrenwerte Gesellschaft*. Although the adjective *ehrenwert* is primarily positive, meaning respectable or honourable, in this established phrase, it functions as a euphemistic term for the Sicilian Mafia (DWDS, n.d.-b, ″ehrenwert″). Through its use, the author transfers the concept of organised crime to his political opponents. This seemingly unassuming, assertive statement thus conveys a strong negative emotion and an implicit appeal.

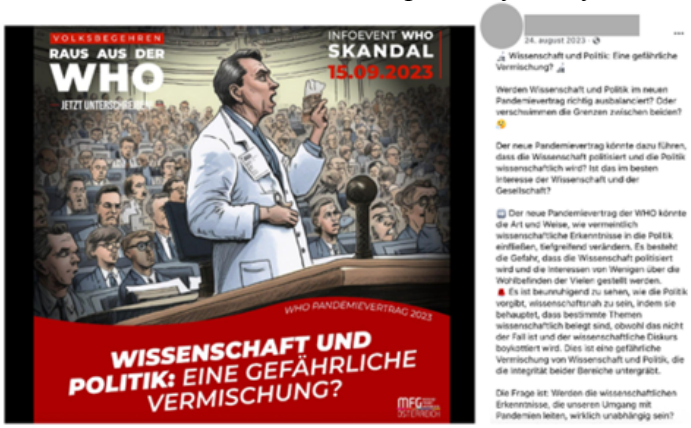
Comment [C5] is the most linguistically expressive. Here, the originally formal assertive, due to the accumulation of pejorative and negative evaluative units, as well as exclamatory sentences, transforms into an expressive speech act representing indignation and disgust. These emotions are duplicated visually (through emojis), which do not directly reflect reality, but signal the author's emotional state. Comments [C1] to [C5] demonstrate the gradual emotional gradation of assertives up to their functional transformation into other types of speech acts.

In relation to the visual aspect of the analysed comments, it can be observed that emotions occur frequently, supplementing, modifying, or replacing the verbal component of the assertives. The visual elements under scrutiny range on a functional scale from affirmative ones (emojis of agreement, a bullseye, an OK gesture, applause, or pointing to the original post) to emojis expressing an affective stance. In such cases, a semantic shift occurs; for example, the vomiting emoji symbolises the degree of indignation and the urgency of the problem. The utilization of positively charged emojis, such as clasped hands to denote gratitude and a heart to signify agreement, serves to reinforce the group's internal cohesion.

Other comments can also contain multimodal assertives, where the text is supplemented by external visual content, such as a shared quote accompanied by a portrait of an authority figure. An example can be seen in comment [C1] in Figure 4 (see below). Here, the image serves not only as an illustration, but also as visual evidence intended to reinforce the truth of both the original post and the verbal part of the comment (*Ganz nach Plan*):

Figure 4

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Selected Comments



Comments (selected illustrative comment)

[redacted]

Ganz nach Plan

(Just as planned)



[C1]

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023c)

Directives are speech acts of the directive type, realised primarily through performative verbs in standard communication (e.g., *auffordern* (to call upon), *befehlen* (to command), bitten (to ask), *einladen* (to invite), etc.). Their primary function is to influence the addressee's behavior. In this context, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of imperative sentences, which function as directives in the realm of digital discourse. In addition to the aforementioned ways of realising directives, it is necessary to reflect on the findings of analyses of assertives. In conspiracy discourse, these often acquire a secondary illocutionary dimension of a directive, thereby functioning as indirect speech acts.

Concerning the empirical basis, in this section, the focus will be on direct speech acts, which are represented to a significantly lesser extent in the corpus:

Figure 5

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Selected Comments



[redacted]
11. decembra 2023 ·

⁉Noch Fragen oder ist jetzt dem letzten Corona-Fanatiker klar, dass wir von 2020 bis 2022 in einer durch Massentests inszenierten Gesundheitskrise gelebt haben ❓😎

Comments (selected illustrative comment)

[redacted]

Und die Gläubigen Lämmer haben sich bis zu "X" Mal eine "Impfung" geben lassen,
Die nur nachgewiesene Nebenwirkungen hat !
Leute denkt noch ein bisschen weiter als euch die Medien geben !
Grippe sind immer schon Corona Viren ! [C1]

(And the gullible sheep have had a 'vaccine' given to them loads of times, and it's only had side effects!
Don't just take the media's word for it, think for yourself !
As we all know, the flu is always caused by coronaviruses !)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023d)

Figure 6

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Selected Comments



[redacted]
7. decembra 2023 ·

Es bleibt jedem selbst überlassen, eine Maske zu tragen.
Wenn aber ausgerechnet der ehemalige grüne Gesundheitsminister, der wohl x-fach geimpft ist, verkündet, dass er wieder Maske trägt, stellt man sich schon die Frage: Wie sehr vertraut er selbst der Impfung? 😬
Schließlich hat er uns doch damals versprochen, dass die Impfung "die Wende bringt". Wenn sie also wirklich so super schützt, wie uns versprochen wurde, ist das doch gar nicht notwendig - oder Herr Ex-Minister? 😅

Comments (selected illustrative comment)

[redacted]

Die Frage ist, WAS wurde ihm geimpft, welche Charge, usw
Und vielleicht hat er ständig Infekte und will sein Nebenan nicht anstecken (nicht wirklich ernst gemeint)
Solche Menschen gehören eigentlich ignoriert ! [C1]

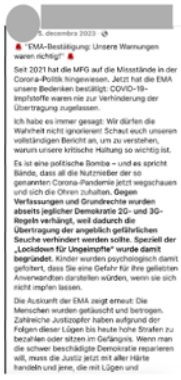
(So, the question is, what was he vaccinated with, which batch, and so on?
And perhaps he's constantly catching infections and doesn't want to infect his neighbour (not literally, of course).
People like that really should be ignored !)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023e)

Figure 7

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Selected Comments




"EMA-Bestätigung: Unsere Warnungen waren richtig!"

Seit 2021 hat die MFG auf die Missstände in der Corona-Politik hingewiesen. Jetzt hat die EMA unsere Bedenken bestätigt: COVID-19-Impfstoffe waren nie zur Verhinderung der Übertragung zugelassen.

Ich habe es immer gesagt: Wir dürfen die Wahrheit nicht ignorieren! Schaut euch unseren vollständigen Bericht an, um zu verstehen, warum unsere kritische Haltung so wichtig ist.

Es ist eine politische Bombe – und es spricht Bände, dass all die Nutznießer der so genannten Corona-Pandemie jetzt wegschauen und sich die Ohren zuhalten. **Gegen Verfassungen und Grundrechte wurden abseits jeglicher Demokratie 2G- und 3G-Regeln verhängt, weil dadurch die Übertragung der angeblich gefährlichen Seuche verhindert werden sollte. Speziell der „Lockdown für Ungeimpfte" wurde damit begründet.** Kinder wurden psychologisch damit gefoltert, dass Sie eine Gefahr für ihre geliebten Anverwandten darstellen würden, wenn sie sich nicht impfen lassen.

Die Auskunft der EMA zeigt erneut: Die Menschen wurden getäuscht und betrogen. Zahlreiche Justizopfer haben aufgrund der Folgen dieser Lügen bis heute hohe Strafen zu bezahlen oder sitzen im Gefängnis. Wenn man die schwer beschädigte Demokratie reparieren will, muss die Justiz jetzt mit aller Härte handeln und jene, die mit Lügen und

Comments (selected illustrative comment)

Hier zum Nachlesen !! [C1]
(Read more here !!)


Europäische Arzneimittelbehörde spricht von „Missverständnis"

EMA entzieht der Impfkampagne jede Grundlage

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023f)

Figures 5–7 and their accompanying comments represent a representative sample of the identified direct directives. Despite the absence of conventional directive verbs, the identification of their illocutionary intent is possible based on other pragmatic features. In the comments appended to figures 5 and 7, the direct appeal is conveyed by a sentence type – specifically an imperative sentence (*Leute denkt noch ein bisschen weiter als euch die Medien geben !*), which explicitly urges the addressee to alter their cognitive stance. In the comment to figure 6, the use of a competing form of the passive with a modal factor is evident (*Solche Menschen gehören eigentlich ignoriert !* [C1]). The subjective opinion is thereby transformed into a categorical demand. These directives must therefore be considered as part of a broader discursive framework, relating both to the comment itself and to the community's overall line of argument. These appeals are frequently accompanied by external references (see Figure 7), which provide argumentative support for the direct appeal. While these appeals do not typically target a specific individual, they are directed towards a collective recipient who shares similar attitudes, thereby reinforcing the group spirit.

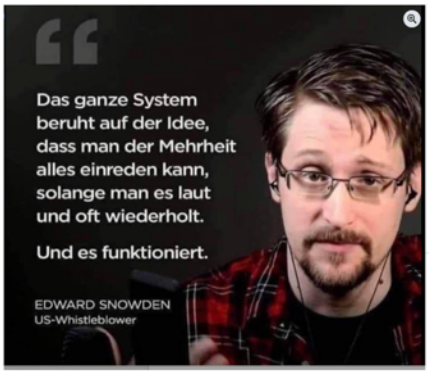
Expressives are primarily linked to the speaker's mental state and serve as indicators of the emotions being experienced. Although typical performative verbs in this category include *danken* (to thank), *gratulieren* (to congratulate), *(sich) entschuldigen* (to apologise), and *kondolieren* (to offer condolences), the empirical data suggest a similar trend to that seen with directives: the expressive function is realised primarily through indirect verbal and visual means. A partial exception is the verb *danken,* which occurs in the corpus at two pragmatic levels. Its predominant usage is in conjunction with negation. The expression of a negative stance, whether towards vaccination (e.g., *Impfen nein Danke*) or political opponents (*danke für nichts, Opposition!*), is characterised by an ironic undertone. Conversely, the verb *danken* assumes a

positive connotation when addressed to like-minded allies and authorities in recognition of their commitment (e.g., *Danke Dr. Spitzbart ... Super, danke für euren Einsatz für uns alle*).

The majority of expressive elements in the analysed discourse serve the function of expressing emotion and are accompanied by linguistic units carrying a high emotional charge. The following figures illustrate the comments in which they occur:

Figure 8

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Selected Comments



[redacted]
7. marec 2023 ·
Einfach zum Nachdenken ! 😀

Comments (selected illustrative comments)

[redacted]

Das größte Experiment am Menschen 🥶 Der größte kriminelle Betrug an der Menschheit 🥶 [C1]
(This is the biggest experiment on humans ever 🥶 It's basically a massive crime against humanity 🥶.

[redacted]

MÄÄÄHHH das hat Mann ja klar und Deutlich bemerkt....wie viele Määäähhh es gibt. 👍👍👍 [C2]
(BAAAAH, you really did notice that loud and clear... just how many "baaahs" there are. 👍👍👍)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023g)

Figure 9

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Selected Comments



[redacted]
17. máj 2023 ·
Einfach zum Nachdenken!

Comments (selected illustrative comments)

[redacted]
Trotteln werden von Obertrotteln regiert [C1]
(Fools are ruled by bigger fools.)

[redacted]
Diese SASSI SASSI SASSI SASSI werde ich mein Leben lang nicht mehr vergessen. [C2]
(I will never forget this SASSI SASSI SASSI SASSI for the rest of my life.)

[redacted]
Diese Arschlöcher werde ich sicher nie mehr sehen! Weder live noch im TV! [C3]
(I'll definitely never see those arseholes again! Neither in person nor on TV!)

[redacted]
Unsere lieben "ImpfNazi" ganz extreme "UnMenschenfreunde". [C4]
(Our dear 'vaccine Nazis', those utterly extreme 'enemies of humanity'.)

[redacted]
Ich kann diese verlogenen und korrupten Typen nicht mehr sehen! [C5]
(I can't stand these dishonest, corrupt lot any longer!)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023h)

Figure 10

A Post From the Facebook Group "Zeit für Aufarbeitung" With Selected Comments



[redacted] 7. decembra 2023 ·

Es bleibt jedem selbst überlassen, eine Maske zu tragen.
Wenn aber ausgerechnet der ehemalige grüne Gesundheitsminister, der wohl x-fach geimpft ist, verkündet, dass er wieder Maske trägt, stellt man sich schon die Frage: Wie sehr vertraut er selbst der Impfung?
Schließlich hat er uns doch damals versprochen, dass die Impfung "die Wende bringt". Wenn sie also wirklich so super schützt, wie uns versprochen wurde, ist das doch gar nicht notwendig - oder Herr Ex-Minister?

Comments (selected illustrative comment)

[redacted]

Angstschober hat wieder Angst und trägt Maske - obwohl erwiesen ist, dass sie nichts NUTZT!
Wo kann er sich "ANSEHEN" lassen, der Hirngewaschene oder Dumme ??
Nur Dummköpfe nehmen sich IHN als gutes Beispiel.
ER war Mittäter in der PLANDEMIE.
Ein ex. Lehrer als Gesundheitsminister - da kann nur wenig rauskommen.
Das sind leider Verfallserscheinungen - dass so viele Politiker als Marionetten dienen - weil nicht Qualifiziert mit dem Amt und oftmals fehlt der Hausverstand. [C1]

(Angstschober is scared again and wearing a mask – even though it's been proven that they're Useless!
Where can this brainwashed or stupid man go to be 'seen'?
Only fools take HIM as a good example.
HE was an accomplice in the PLANDEMIC.
A former teacher as health minister – little good can come of that.
Unfortunately, these are signs of decline – that so many politicians act as puppets – because they are unqualified for the role and often lack common sense.)

Note. From Post on Facebook (Egel, 2023i)

Most of the expressive language is directed towards a "systemic adversary" and employs linguistic units with inherently negative connotations (e.g., Figure 8 [C1]: *Experiment am Menschen*; *(der) kriminelle Betrug an der Menschheit*; Figure 9 [C5]: *verlogenen und korrupten Typen*; Figure 10 [C1]: *nur Dummköpfe*), pejoratives (e.g., Figure 9 [C1–C3]: *Trotteln, Obertrottel; Arschlöcher*) or onomatopoeic interjection simulating animal sounds (e.g., Figure 8 [C2]: *MÄÄÄHHH*), which serve to dehumanise the opponent.

An interesting phenomenon is the formation of ad hoc compounds (e.g., Figure 9 [C4] "*ImpfNazi*", "*unMenschenfreunde*") and portmanteaus (e.g., Figure 10 [C1]: *Angstschober*/ Angst+Anschober, *PLANDEMIE*/ Plan+Pandemie), which, in their semantically condensed form, carry a strong evaluative dimension. The employment of capital letters and the accumulation of emojis (e.g., emojis of disgust, irony) serve to augment the intensity of the shared emotion, thereby prompting an immediate affective reaction in the recipient. Furthermore, it is possible to identify ironic shifts in meaning in connection with *unsere lieben* ("*ImpfNazi*") or the metaphor *Politiker als Marionetten*, which contribute to the discursive discrediting of the opponent.

The Heterogeneity of Slovak Comments

In comparison with the German empirical data, which demonstrated a high degree of opinion coherence, the Slovak corpus[1] is characterised by a certain degree of heterogeneity. The comments encompass not only expressions of community agreement with the source post, but also counterarguments articulated through opinions characterised by a pronounced expressive element. This discrepancy may be attributable to some factors; however, it is hypothesized that

[1]All analysed comments refer to the YouTube video excerpt shown in Figure 11, and translations are also included.

it is most likely to result from the inherent characteristics of the source post. Notwithstanding the presence of visual components in the original video, the monologue delivered by the protagonist is the primary element that dominates the video. This may be a key factor in the manner in which the content is processed, as the audience's primary focus is on the verbal component and its arguments. Moreover, the inherent characteristics of the YouTube channel itself are of equal significance. The algorithms utilised by the platform have been observed to enhance the virality of content, transcending the boundaries of the opinion community. This approach has the effect of drawing opinion opponents into the discussion as well.

In view of the heterogeneity of the corpus, it is also important to note the specific linguistic variability. A proportion of the analysed comments have been written in Czech, yet this does not compromise the integrity of the study. A high degree of mutual intelligibility is observable between both languages, Slovak and Czech, with the result that users of these languages form a shared communicative sphere in the online environment. In addition, Czech comments have been integrated into the analysis to enhance its comprehensiveness. The analysis is principally focused on identifying discrepancies in comparison to the German corpus. The objective of this study is to identify, above all, the verbal representation of disagreement and its reflection at the illocutionary level of the comments.

Before analysing the contrasts themselves, it should be noted that the expression of opinion in the Slovak corpus follows a pattern analogous to that of the German comments, albeit with a different quantitative distribution of the individual illocutionary levels. Expressive statements predominate, characterised by gratitude for shared information and appreciation for the protagonist's courage in publicly articulating her own views. In both linguistic contexts, a high degree of interpersonal solidarity with the main protagonist can be observed, expressed through respect and esteem. In this particular section of the corpus, assertives frequently coalesce with the expressive function, thereby serving to substantiate a shared cognitive basis (i.e., awareness of the issue). In addition, directives are present in small numbers, typically as part of a broader set of comments, and are characterised by a tendency towards a call for mutual support. The following examples represent the aforementioned illocutionary levels and, in terms of realization, combine positive verbalisation with visual means (emojis) that enhance the affective charge of agreement:

Figure 11
A Screenshot of a Video From the BS - B Spiritual YouTube Channel, Along With Comments



ZELENÁ ŽABKA NA POTRAVINÁCH?🐸 Stojí za ňou Bill Gates. Čo to pre nás znamená? RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

[redacted] Pripojiť sa Odoberať 561 Zdieľať Uložiť ...

25 tis. zhliadnutí pred 2 rokmi #rainforestalliance
Podpor likom, odberom, zdieľaním či komentom 🙏 ďakujem

💙 OSOBNÝ VÝKLAD KARIET 💙 ...viac

Comments (selected illustrative comments)

Assertives:

[redacted]
pred 2 rokmi
Diky Bianka, opät skveelee video.. som rada ze mas odvahu takto verejne o tom hovorit.. ked nie ty, tak kto?? :D ja uz par rokov ziadne polotovary nekupujem, jedine kimchi kym si najadem svoj vlastny recept :) straavvujem saa uz viac akko 15 rokov rastlinne a nie som ani pichnuta.. :D ale tak komu uz dneska mozes verit. preeto hovorim, ze najlepsie jee prestahovat sa na opussteny ostrov, pestovaat si potravinky zit a uziivaat ssi samotu... [C1]
(Thanks, Bianka, another great video... I'm glad you're feeling brave enough to talk about this publicly. If not you, then who? :D I haven't bought any processed foods for a few years now, except for kimchi, until I figure out my own recipe. :) I've been eating a plant-based diet for over 15 years and I'm not sick a day... :D But who can you trust these days? That's why I say the best thing is to move to a deserted island, grow your own food, and enjoy the solitude...)

[redacted]
pred 2 rokmi
Děkuji, cítím to stejně ❤️ [C2]
(Thank you, I feel the same way ❤️)

[redacted]
pred 2 rokmi
🇸🇰Povedali ste to presne tak ako to už veľmi dlho viem a chápem🇸🇰 [C3]
(🇸🇰You put it exactly as I've known and understood it for a very long time🇸🇰)

Expressives:

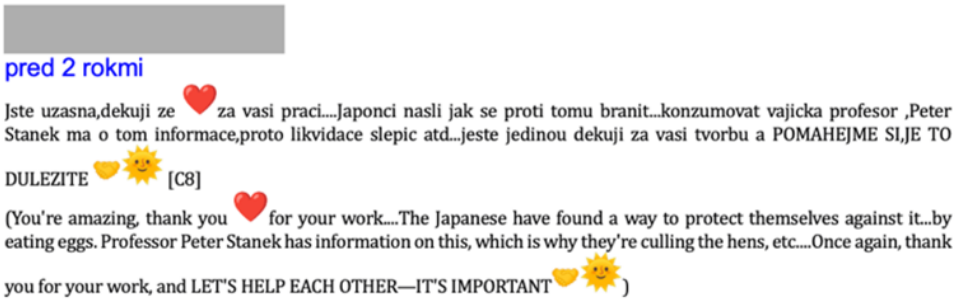
[redacted]
pred 2 rokmi
Super ze si to dokazes tak zrozumitelne jjednoducho vysvetlit ,dakujem ☺️❤️ [C4]
(It's great that you can explain it so clearly and simply—thank you ☺️❤️)

[redacted]
pred 2 rokmi
Děkuji za informaci ,dám si větší pozor při nákupu 😇 [C5]
(Thank you for the information; I'll be more careful when shopping.)

[redacted]
pred 2 rokmi
Ďakujem Bianka za ďalšie skvelé informácie 😍 [C6]
(Thank you, Bianka, for another great piece of information)

[redacted]
pred 2 rokmi
Moja zlatá, vzácne informácie a zároveň tak smutné až desivé. Ďakujem,že otvárate ľuďom oči. Veľmi si Vás vážim. ❤️ [C7]
(My dear, this is valuable information—yet so sad and even frightening. Thank you for opening people's eyes. I hold you in very high regard.)

Direktives:



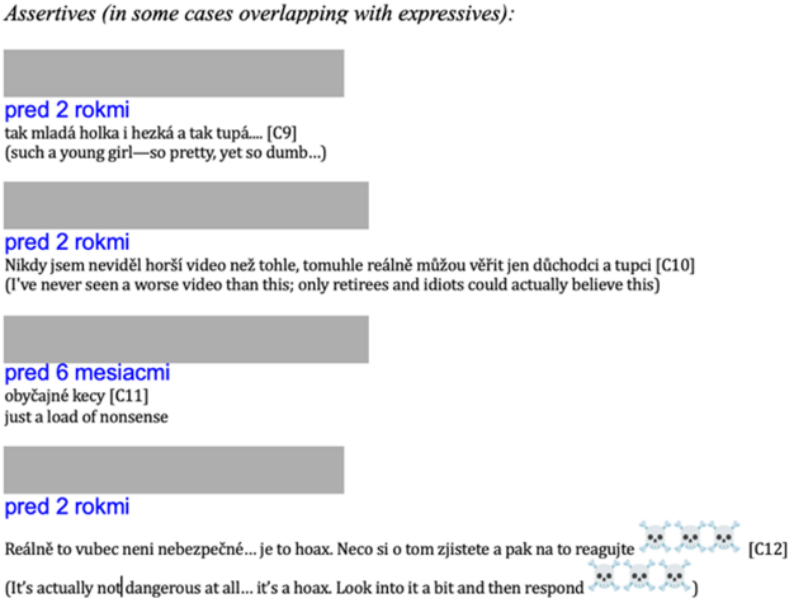
Note. From Video on YouTube (B Spiritual, 2023)

A fundamental departure from the German corpus is represented by the counterarguments present in the Slovak corpus. These are speech acts by opponents that disrupt the affirmative line of the discussion. The depiction of these emotions is primarily through assertives and expressives that are characterised by a negative emotional tone.

Within the illocutionary level of assertives, the following functional subtypes can be identified: denigration of the speaker's cognitive ability with the aim of negating the truth value of her statements [C9]; strong criticism of the content combined with the delegitimization of the audience (potential supporters) [C10]; questioning of the truthfulness of shared information by labeling it a hoax or disinformation with an explicit call for legal accountability [C11–C15]; sarcastic questioning of arguments through demands for empirical evidence and sources [C16–C20]:

Figure 12

Selected Comments on a Video on the BS - B Spiritual YouTube Channel





Note. From Video on YouTube (B Spiritual, 2023)

Expressives are evident in conjunction with assertives, in which a pejorative verbal component predominates (see the above comments and [C21]), as well as independently. In the latter case, they are most commonly realised through emojis of mockery and/or applause, which symbolise an ironic perception of shared content (see [C22]):

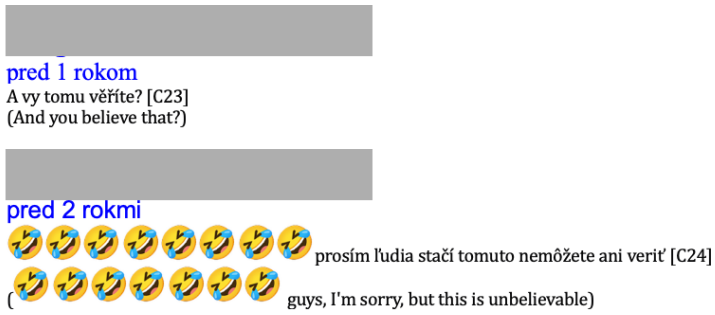
Figure 13
Selected Comments on a Video on the BS - B Spiritual YouTube Channel



Note. From Video on YouTube (B Spiritual, 2023)

As with affirmative comments, only a few directives are found in the area of counter position. These appeals are made either implicitly or as indirect speech acts, such as rhetorical questions [C23] or sarcastic statements [C24]:

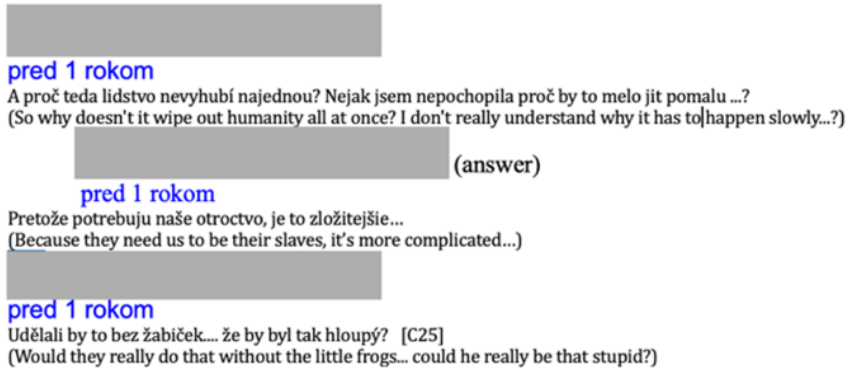
Figure 14
Selected Comments on a Video on the BS - B Spiritual YouTube Channel

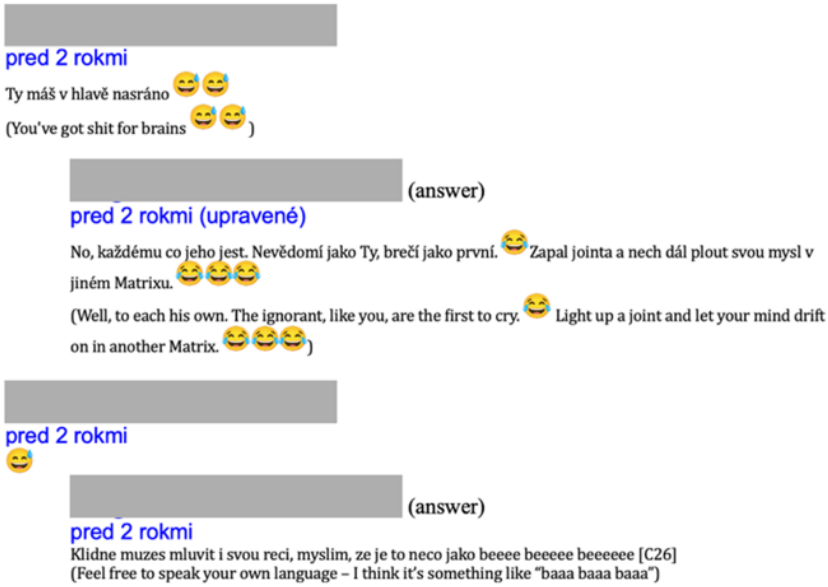


Note. From Video on YouTube (B Spiritual, 2023)

It is also intriguing to observe the dynamics of interactive threads within the Slovak corpus. Attempts at a rational deconstruction of the narrative ([C25]) are evident, as are defensive strategies. When an opponent disrupts the homogeneous zone of agreement, the community's immediate response is to discredit them, as evidenced in [C26]:

Figure 15
Selected Comments on a Video on the BS - B Spiritual YouTube Channel





Note. From Video on YouTube (B Spiritual, 2023)

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of German and Slovak conspiracy discourse on social media has yielded findings that can be summarised as follows:

From a pragmatic-functional perspective, comments represent linguistic constructs that play a key role in the dissemination and reinforcement of conspiracy narratives. The primary function of these expressions in both environments is to demonstrate group cohesion and affirmative agreement. Despite the fact that assertives constitute the predominant form of speech act, they seldom manifest as neutral. In the German sample, assertives primarily function as carriers of covert appeals (indirect directives) and intense emotions (indirect expressives) within the community itself. In contrast, in the Slovak sample, assertives are also observed to possess a distinct corrective and confrontational dimension. A fundamental difference between the examined linguistic environments can be identified in this respect (German: unity of opinion; Slovak: heterogeneity of opinion). Direct directives and expressives are indeed less prevalent; direct directives were identified almost exclusively in the German corpus, where they serve to mobilise and vent affective states explicitly.

In the context of the verbal and visual representation of conspiracy content, a wide spectrum of stylistic devices was observed. These ranged from neutral linguistic means through expressive pejoratives to creative ad hoc devices and contaminations, as evidenced in the German section. In comparison, German comments exhibit a higher degree of creativity, while expressive pejorative units are more frequently represented in Slovak comments. The visual aspect, primarily represented by emojis, fulfils a dual role. In addition to its illustrative function, it acts as a semantic hook and trigger for a subsequent emotional reaction. This, in turn, serves to increase the post's viral potential.

The utilisation of verbal or visual means, or a combination thereof, is predominantly observed to serve the following purposes: Within the German corpus, the following strategies are employed: the discrediting of a "systemic opponent", the delegitimising of the official narrative, and the reinforcement of the community's ideological identity. It is important to note that, due to the public accessibility of the analysed Facebook group, the comments also acquire

the status of publicly available information. From this standpoint, they assume a role that is equal in importance, if not more so, in the propagation of conspiracy theories within the online environment, surpassing the significance of the original posts themselves. Within the Slovak corpus, this role entails the reinforcement of the community's ideological identity, the mobilisation of its supporters, and the specific discrediting of the primary antagonist in instances of opposition. It is also noteworthy that there has been a considerable delegitimisation of the official version of events, as well as that presented by the main protagonist – in this case, by her opponents.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contract No. APVV-22-0221.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Communication of Local Development Policy by Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study aimed to examines the communication of local development policies by the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality, focusing on: 1) policy content, and 2) the characteristics of word and phrase usage. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzed the Mayor's policy declaration documents from an award-winning administration recognized for good governance, employing purposive sampling and deductive content analysis. Findings indicate that the main content structure begins with the vision, "A City of Happiness and a Model Learning City of the Nation," which serves as a guiding framework for communication. This vision is divided into eight sub-themes: infrastructure, economy and tourism, natural resources and environment, holistic well-being, education, religion and culture, politics and administration, community and social welfare, and smart city development. These are linked by a central phrase, "for the benefit and happiness of the citizens." The communication strategy uses memorable language, emphasizes imagery and emotion, links the city's identity to local context, and encourages citizen participation through invitational phrases and value-laden expressions such as sustainability, quality of life, and fairness. Calls to Action (CTA) are integral, stimulating participation, fostering civic awareness, and promoting policy compliance, such as joining the Green City program or volunteering. Word and phrase usage reflects five dimensions: creating a vision and city image, building trust and leadership, clarifying policy content, motivating participation, and fostering collaboration with citizens and stakeholders. These strategies enhance the effectiveness of policy communication, integrate participatory principles and city branding, strengthen public support, and drive sustainable urban development in Hua Hin.

Keywords: policy communication, policy content, word and phrase usage, local development, mayor

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Introduction

Communication through the declaration of local development policies prior to assuming office by a mayor serves as a crucial mechanism in local public administration. It is rooted in the principles of participatory democracy, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and the public scrutiny of local leaders (Fung, 2015; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). This practice has been influenced by the national political system, in which the Prime Minister must present policy statements to Parliament before taking office in order to inform legislators and citizens of the government's administrative direction. In the context of local governance in Thailand, mayoral policy declarations are mandated under the Municipality Act B.E. 2496 and its amendments, particularly Section 48 Decem, which requires mayors to declare their policies before the municipal council within 30 days after assuming office (Chaiwong & Srisang, 2022). The essence of such declarations lies in communicating the content and messages of local development policies, which must align with municipal authority and local development strategies specified in municipal development plans.

These principles aim to establish a connection between local politics and local administration, ensuring the legitimacy of elected executives while allowing municipal council members, as representatives of the people, to examine and provide recommendations on proposed policies (Grindle, 2017). Policy declarations therefore function as political and administrative rituals with symbolic significance, representing the public expression of a leader's intention to develop the city (Fairclough, 2018).

The analytical framework for examining local development policy communication in Hua Hin Municipality consists of three dimensions: (1) the main structure of policy content, including vision, goals, measures, and expected outcomes (OECD, 2020); (2) content communication strategies, focusing on message organization, emphasis, and persuasive language (Entman, 2019); and (3) Call to Action (CTA) communication, analyzing words and phrases that encourage public participation and civic engagement (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015) Additionally, the analysis of words and phrases in policy communication encompasses five dimensions: creating city vision and image, building trust and leadership, enhancing policy clarity, motivating participation, and fostering collaboration with citizens and stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2020).

On June 20, 2025, at the Hua Hin Municipal Council Chamber in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, Mr. Nopporn Wuttikul, Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality, delivered his local development policy declaration before the municipal council during the first ordinary session of 2025, chaired by Mr. Cheep Suksri. The policy declaration covered eight dimensions aimed at "transforming Hua Hin into a livable city through sustainable development." These included infrastructure, economy and tourism, natural resources and environment, holistic well-being, education, religion and culture, politics and administration, community and social welfare, and smart city development.

This study addresses significant knowledge gaps in Thai research on local policy communication. Most previous studies have focused primarily on strategic policy content, while lacking in-depth analysis of how words and phrases are employed to construct vision, trust, and public motivation. Furthermore, limited research has integrated political communication theories with the Thai local governance context (Fairclough, 2018; Fung, 2015). This study therefore contributes new knowledge concerning effective policy communication mechanisms that strengthen mutual understanding between leaders and

citizens, clarify urban visions, and support participatory communication strategies for sustainable local development.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the content of local development policy communication by the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality.
2. To investigate the characteristics of word and phrase usage in the communication of local development policies by the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using document-based content analysis. Data were collected from policy declaration documents presented before municipal councils. Existing documentary data were systematically classified, categorized, interpreted in terms of content, and synthesized to generate analytical conclusions. Unit of Analysis The study purposively selected the policy declaration documents of the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality as the unit of analysis. Hua Hin Municipality was chosen because it is recognized as a well-managed local administrative organization that has received several prestigious awards, including the ASEAN Sustainable City Award in the Clean Air category from Malaysia, the National Outstanding Sustainable Environmental Award, the First Runner-up Award for Sustainable Livable Municipality in 2022, the Prototype Elderly School Award of Prachuap Khiri Khan Province in 2021, the Merit Maker Plus Award for drowning prevention in 2025, and the Sustainable Tourism Management Standard (STMS) certification in 2022.

Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of a policy declaration content analysis form validated by experts for reliability and content validity. The instrument comprised two sections: Section 1: Analysis of Local Development Policy Communication Content This section consisted of three analytical dimensions: (1) the main structure of policy content, (2) content communication strategies, and (3) analysis of policy communication content in terms of Call to Action (CTA). Section 2: Analysis of Word and Phrase Usage in Policy Communication This section consisted of five analytical dimensions: (1) the use of words and phrases to construct city vision and image, (2) the use of words and phrases to build trust and leadership, (3) the use of words and phrases to enhance policy clarity and implementation, (4) the use of words and phrases to motivate participation, and (5) the use of words and phrases to foster collaboration with citizens and stakeholders.

Data Collection

Relevant original documents were collected from publicly accessible municipal websites, specifically mayoral policy declaration statements delivered upon assuming office from three municipalities. The documents were converted into standardized digital formats to facilitate systematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through coding procedures based on eight analytical categories: (1) the main structure of policy content, (2) content communication strategies, (3) policy communication in terms of Call to Action, (4) the use of words and phrases for constructing city vision and image, (5) the use of words and phrases for building trust and leadership, (6) the use of words and phrases for enhancing policy clarity and implementation, (7) the use of words and phrases for motivating participation, and (8) the use of words and phrases for fostering collaboration with citizens and stakeholders. The findings were interpreted and synthesized through descriptive analysis.

Research Findings

Findings on the Communication Content of Local Development Policies of Hua Hin Municipality

Main Structure of Policy Content

The policy declaration of Mr. Nopporn Wuttikul, Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality, contains several key messages reflecting communication directed toward citizens, communities, and stakeholders. The main structure of the policy message can be summarized as follows: (1) Policy Vision: The policies were communicated under the clear vision of "developing Hua Hin into a City of Happiness and a Model Learning City of the Nation." This vision functions as the conceptual framework guiding communication, portraying Hua Hin not merely as a tourism destination, but as a model city in terms of quality of life, learning, and sustainable development. (2) Supporting Policy Themes: The vision was further communicated through eight interconnected policy dimensions: infrastructure; economy and tourism; natural resources and environment; holistic well-being; education, religion, and culture; politics and administration; community and social welfare; and smart city development. (3) Connecting Language Across Messages: These policy dimensions were linked through common expressions such as "for the benefit and happiness of the citizens" and "toward sustainable development," helping citizens understand that all policy areas are integrated within a comprehensive urban development framework. Thus, the overall structure of policy communication follows a sequence of "vision → strategic themes → expected outcomes," targeting the citizens of Hua Hin Municipality and emphasizing values such as happiness, quality of life, learning, sustainability, technology, and collaboration.

Content Communication Strategies

The policy communication strategy emphasized accessibility, memorability, emotional appeal, and local relevance. Memorable phrases such as "convenient, clean, and safe" followed the "rule of three," making them emotionally impactful and easy to recall. The communication also connected Hua Hin's identity with recognizable local elements such as beaches, natural scenery, culture, and public spaces, thereby strengthening place identity and city branding. In addition, the policy language promoted citizen participation through invitational expressions such as "sharing happiness and hardship together," "every action must consider the people's voices," and "developing together with all sectors." Such language reduced the distance between government and citizens by positioning people as active participants rather than passive recipients. The policies also emphasized change and future orientation through phrases such as "upgrading," "transforming," "toward a smart

city," and "ready for change," which stimulated perceptions of progress and modernization. Furthermore, value-oriented language, including "sustainability," "quality of life," "fairness," and "low-carbon city," added ethical and social dimensions to the communication.

Policy Communication in Terms of Call to Action

The local development policy communication of Hua Hin Municipality clearly reflected campaign-oriented communication designed to stimulate public participation through strategic Calls to Action (CTA). The policy messages employed words, phrases, and symbolic language intended to invite, motivate, and inspire citizens to participate in urban development. Three forms of CTA were identified: (1) Participatory CTA—encouraging collective action, such as "Let us work together to develop Hua Hin into a livable city." (2) Civic Awareness CTA—promoting civic responsibility, such as "Let us be good hosts for tourists" and "Hua Hin must remain clean for everyone." (3) Practical Policy CTA—encouraging concrete participation in municipal initiatives, such as joining green city projects, volunteering, or downloading the Hua Hin Smart City application. These CTA strategies transformed awareness into action and represented the core of development communication at the local level. By employing simple, positive, and motivational language, the municipality fostered a sense of shared ownership, civic pride, and collective responsibility, ultimately supporting participatory and sustainable urban development.

Findings on the Characteristics of Word and Phrase Usage in the Communication of Local Development Policies of Hua Hin Municipality

The policy communication of Hua Hin Municipality through the policy declaration of Mayor Nopporn Wuttikul demonstrates distinctive characteristics in the use of words and phrases that effectively reflect the city's intentions, policies, and vision. Academic analysis reveals five major dimensions as follows.

The Use of Words and Phrases to Construct Vision and City Image

The policy declaration begins by constructing a vision and city image through positive and inspirational language, such as the phrases "Hua Hin: A City of Happiness" and "A Model Learning City of the Nation." These expressions play a significant role in creating shared imagery, enabling citizens to envision a prosperous future city in terms of economy, society, and environment (Entman, 1993). Such words and phrases reflect the use of framing strategies that shape public interpretation of policies in a positive manner consistent with citizens' values. Furthermore, the use of positive adjectives such as "convenient," "clean," "safe," and "sustainable" communicates multidimensional urban values while simultaneously establishing the ethos of both the city and its leadership. Vision-oriented language also functions as a city branding strategy that reinforces Hua Hin's identity as a smart city emphasizing digital development, identity-based tourism, and sustainable environmental management. These linguistic choices position Hua Hin as a modern and distinctive city.

The Use of Words and Phrases to Build Trust and Leadership

The policy declaration emphasizes the credibility of leadership through language reflecting sincerity, attentiveness, and understanding of citizens. Expressions such as "standing beside the people through happiness and hardship" and "every action must consider the people's voices" represent pathos-oriented communication that reassures citizens that the leader is

committed to solving public problems. Ethical and moral expressions such as “sincerity” and “consistency” strengthen the ethos of leadership. Simultaneously, references to legal legitimacy, such as “in accordance with the Municipality Act B.E. 2496,” function as logos, reinforcing credibility and legitimacy. Another important dimension is the reflection of citizens’ identity through phrases such as “understanding that citizens need a true representative of the people,” which makes citizens feel acknowledged and included. Such language clearly strengthens public trust and confidence in leadership.

The Use of Words and Phrases to Enhance Policy Clarity and Implementation

The policy declaration employs structural language and sequential expressions to enhance citizens’ understanding of policy direction. Phrases such as “focusing on sustainable development while adapting to change” and “developing proactive healthcare management systems” help citizens recognize the relationship between policy measures and expected outcomes. Repetitive use of action-oriented words such as “develop” and “promote” reinforces continuity and emphasis. In addition, outcome-oriented expressions such as “for the well-being of the citizens” connect policy measures directly to everyday life. These linguistic strategies reflect the concept of clarity in public policy communication, emphasizing communication that is concise, understandable, and practically applicable.

The Use of Words and Phrases to Motivate and Encourage Participation

The policy declaration prominently employs motivational language to stimulate public participation and support. Expressions such as “creating environmental volunteer networks,” “building collective happiness for Hua Hin,” and “promoting community-based health management” encourage citizens to perceive themselves as active contributors to urban development. Verbs such as “focus,” “create,” and “promote” communicate continuity and concrete action, demonstrating that development extends beyond rhetoric into practice. Such language also reinforces a sense of shared ownership among citizens. These motivational expressions align with the concept of participatory communication (Servaes, 2008), combining ethos and pathos with outcome-oriented communication to strengthen public awareness and engagement.

The Use of Words and Phrases to Foster Collaboration With Citizens and Stakeholders

The policy declaration strongly emphasizes collaboration with citizens and stakeholder networks through phrases such as “cooperation among all sectors,” “integrated collaboration across sectors,” and “linking tourism design collaboratively.” These expressions reflect the concept of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008), communicating that leadership opens participatory spaces for citizens and stakeholders. Inclusive language such as “citizens of all age groups” reinforces the perception that no group is excluded from development processes. Furthermore, the language promotes practical participation through statements such as “developing wellness centers as models for nutrition, music, culture, and therapeutic activities,” enabling citizens to recognize their own roles and participate concretely in urban development initiatives.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings on the communication of local development policies by the Mayor before the municipal council prior to assuming office can be summarized as follows: (1) The findings on the communication of local development policies by the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality, which emphasized clear message structures, memorable phrases, and Calls to Action (CTA), are consistent with previous studies while also extending contextual knowledge within the local governance setting. Research on framing and political communication by Entman and Fairclough suggests that language framing is a crucial factor influencing public perception (Entman, 1993; Fairclough, 2018). This study found that the vision frame of "a city of happiness" functioned as a central framework integrating diverse policy measures, corresponding with the concept of City Branding proposed by Kavaratzis, which emphasizes integrating urban identity into strategic messaging (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021). In terms of participation, the findings revealed that CTA-oriented and invitational language stimulated a sense of shared ownership, consistent with Participatory Governance theory and the work of Nabatchi, which highlights participatory communication as a mechanism for enhancing citizen responsiveness (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Thai studies on local communication reported the existence of a "message–practice gap." However, the Hua Hin case confirms that practical language and CTA strategies can reduce this gap when accompanied by pilot measures and clear follow-up mechanisms. Nevertheless, a limitation consistent with previous studies is the risk posed by technical terminology, such as "5G" and "City Operation System," which may create comprehension barriers for general citizens (Heath & O'Hair, 2021). This study therefore highlights the necessity of communicative translation between technical policy language and public language to enhance understanding and participation. Overall, the findings confirm international theoretical perspectives on framing, participatory communication, and city branding, while providing clearer local contextual evidence that visual language design, memorable phrases, and audience-oriented CTA strategies are essential in transforming local policy into effective practice. (2) The findings on the characteristics of word and phrase usage in the communication of local development policies by the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality reflect the effective application of Political Discourse and Strategic Communication concepts at the local level. The use of words and phrases to construct vision and city image corresponds with Framing Theory proposed by Entman (1993) and Fairclough (2018), which suggests that political leaders can shape positive interpretive frameworks enabling citizens to understand and accept policies through symbolically powerful language. Similarly, city-image expressions such as "a city of happiness" and "a model learning city" align with the City Branding concept of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2021), which views language as a tool for constructing urban identity and shared social values. The use of language to build trust and leadership is also consistent with Benoit's (2015) work, which explains that political leaders employ Ethos–Pathos–Logos to establish credibility, trust, and public acceptance. At the same time, language emphasizing policy clarity, including structural and outcome-oriented phrases, reflects the concept of Clarity in Public Policy Communication (Heath & O'Hair, 2021), which stresses systematic and accountable communication. Furthermore, the use of motivational language and collaborative expressions corresponds with the concepts of Participatory Communication (Servaes, 2008) and Collaborative Governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008), both of which view invitational and inclusive language as key mechanisms for fostering participation and shared ownership of policies. The findings therefore confirm that local policy communication through appropriate word and phrase selection is not merely a process of transmitting information, but also a mechanism for generating social empowerment and sustaining long-term urban development.

New Body of Knowledge

The study on the communication of local development policies by the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality generated new bodies of knowledge summarized as follows: (1) The communication content of local development policies under the administration of Nopporn Wuttikul revealed three significant dimensions. First, the policy message structure was clearly organized, beginning with the vision of "A City of Happiness and a Model Learning City of the Nation," which functioned as the central framework guiding communication. The vision was subsequently divided into eight interconnected policy dimensions: infrastructure, economy and tourism, natural resources and environment, holistic well-being, education, religion and culture, politics and administration, community and social welfare, and smart city development. These dimensions were linked through common expressions such as "for the benefit and happiness of the citizens." Second, the content communication strategy employed memorable language emphasizing imagery, emotion, and symbolic meanings connected to the local context. The communication also encouraged public participation through invitational language and value-oriented expressions such as sustainability, quality of life, and fairness. Third, the policies strongly incorporated Call to Action (CTA) strategies aimed at motivating citizens to participate in urban development through civic participation, public consciousness, and practical engagement, such as joining green city initiatives or volunteering. These CTA strategies transformed awareness into action, fostered a sense of shared ownership, and promoted sustainable urban development. Consequently, Hua Hin Municipality's policy communication represents an example of "socially empowering language" that integrates vision, content strategy, and CTA to strengthen public participation and connect policy communication with practical implementation. (2) The characteristics of word and phrase usage in Hua Hin Municipality's policy declaration were consistent with the principles of public policy communication across five dimensions: (1) constructing city vision and image through positive and inspirational language; (2) building trust and leadership through expressions reflecting morality, ethics, and understanding of citizens; (3) enhancing policy clarity through structural and outcome-oriented language; (4) motivating participation through motivational expressions and result-oriented communication; and (5) fostering collaboration with citizens and stakeholder networks through cooperative language. The selection of these words and phrases reflects a communication strategy aimed at "building credibility, creating emotional connection, and providing rational support," thereby making policy communication more persuasive and effective. Furthermore, these communication practices are closely associated with the concepts of participatory governance and city branding, positioning Hua Hin Municipality's policy declaration as an effective model of policy communication in social, psychological, and administrative dimensions.

Conclusion

This study examined the communication of local development policies by the Mayor of Hua Hin Municipality, Thailand, focusing on two dimensions: the content of policy communication and the characteristics of word and phrase usage in policy communication. Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilized document-based content analysis of the mayoral policy declaration presented before the municipal council. The analysis was conducted through systematic coding and descriptive interpretation.

The findings revealed that the communication content was structured around a clear vision of transforming Hua Hin into "a City of Happiness and a Model Learning City of the Nation." This vision served as the central communication framework and was translated into eight

interconnected policy dimensions: infrastructure, economy and tourism, natural resources and environment, holistic well-being, education, religion and culture, politics and administration, community and social welfare, and smart city development. The policy communication strategy employed memorable, image-oriented, and emotionally appealing language linked to local identity while promoting public participation through invitational expressions. Furthermore, the policies incorporated Call to Action (CTA) communication in three forms: participatory engagement, civic consciousness building, and practical involvement in municipal initiatives. These strategies transformed awareness into action, fostered shared ownership, and encouraged sustainable urban development.

The study also found that word and phrase usage reflected five dimensions of effective public policy communication: constructing city vision and image, building trust and leadership, enhancing policy clarity, motivating participation, and fostering collaboration with citizens and stakeholders. The language combined credibility, emotional appeal, and rational support, thereby strengthening policy acceptance and public engagement.

The findings confirm the relevance of Framing Theory, Participatory Communication, Collaborative Governance, and City Branding in local policy communication. The study contributes new knowledge by proposing that effective local policy communication integrates a clear policy architecture, behavior-oriented content strategies, and action-driven communication. Such an approach enables local governments to strengthen citizen participation, improve policy implementation, and promote sustainable urban development.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

Local administrative organizations should establish public communication policies with clear and systematic structures that effectively connect the city's vision, goals, and development outcomes in ways that are easily understandable to citizens. Policy communication should promote the use of inspirational language reflecting the city's identity while encouraging public participation in determining development directions. Furthermore, local governments should support Call to Action (CTA)-oriented communication strategies to stimulate citizen engagement in urban development. Policies concerning city branding and digital communication should also be formulated in order to enhance the city's image and long-term competitiveness.

Practical Recommendations

Municipalities should develop diverse policy communication strategies through both offline and online platforms by employing concise, accessible, and outcome-oriented language that clearly communicates the benefits citizens will receive. Communication materials capable of creating public recognition and emotional connection, such as videos, infographics, and social media content, should be produced. In addition, municipalities should create participatory spaces for public feedback and engagement among all citizen groups. The capacity of personnel in policy communication, public communication, and digital technology utilization should also be strengthened to ensure effective and continuous policy communication.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should examine public perceptions and the impacts of policy communication on citizens' behavior and participation within local communities. Comparative studies on policy communication models among local administrative organizations in tourism cities or smart cities should also be conducted. In addition, further research should explore policy communication through digital media and online platforms within the context of modern urban governance in order to advance knowledge on local policy communication and ensure its relevance to the rapidly evolving digital society.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Reimagining Junks in Taiwanese Art: Transcultural Translation and Virtual Interpretation of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's Paintings

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper examines the transcultural translation of art in the junk paintings of Taiwanese artist Kuo Hsueh-Hu (1908–2012) under Japanese colonial influence, as well as the virtual reality interpretation of his paintings with modern technology. This paper explores how transcultural influences and elements intertwine in junk painting and how junk ships in the Asian maritime era are reviving and reconnecting viewers with virtual reality today. Drawing on Erwin Panofsky's iconology and Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity and the third space, this paper interprets Kuo Hsueh-Hu's paintings through the lens of transcultural translation, cultural diversity, and modern adaptations of virtual reality. Kuo once studied with the Japanese artist Gobara Koto, became the first Taiwanese artist to depict junk painting with gouache, and was awarded the Sunrise Prize (Asahi-shō) at the 9th Taiwan Art Exhibition in 1935 during the Japanese colonial period. As a renowned Taiwanese virtual artist, Hsin-Chien Huang reinvented junks using virtual technology in *Three States of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's Home Gazing* in 2020. This research investigates how junk is reinterpreted through transcultural translation and influences in Kuo's paintings, as well as its modern interpretation through virtual reality.

Keywords: Taiwanese art, junk, Kuo Hsueh-Hu, Hsin-Chien Huang, virtual art

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Introduction

Since ancient times, the junk ship was a wooden sailing vessel that operated between the southeastern coast of China, Taiwan, and the seas of Southeast Asia during the 16th and 17th centuries. The junk ship was not only a tool for international trade but also became a unique cultural landscape in the waters around Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. The Tamsui River winds through the Taipei Basin in northern Taiwan, connecting to the sea. During the Japanese colonial period, Dadaocheng was the most important international trade port town along the Tamsui River and was also a foreign settlement area at the time, serving as a cultural intersection for international trade.

Taiwanese artist Kuo Hsueh-Hu was born in Fanzigou, not far from the Tamsui River. The junks moored along the riverbank became a unique and profound hometown memory from Kuo Hsueh-Hu's childhood. Kuo Hsueh-Hu was a self-taught artist with discipline and hard work and was also a diligent student of the Japanese artist Gobara Koto in colonial Taiwan. At the age of 20, he won the Provincial Exhibition in 1927. Kuo was very skilled at portraying the natural landscape with his close observation and was one of the most famous gouache artists at the first chapter of Taiwanese art history.

This paper will examine the transcultural elements and virtual interpretation of the Kuo's junk painting *Colorful Boats on the Tamsui River* (1982) from the perspective of iconology and cultural theories, aiming to explore the cultural diversity and modern interpretation with virtual reality by the Taiwanese virtual artist Hsin-Chien Huang's work *Three States of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's Home Gazing* in 2020. This artwork has been exhibited in the 2020 Kuo Hsueh-Hu Exhibition in Taiwan Art Museum, awarded the National Winner of the Asia Academy Creative Awards in 2020, and exhibited in the joint-exhibition *Blossoming: The Tech-Art in Formosa* in the Meet Digital Center in Milan, Italy, in 2024. Here I would like to explore the trancultural elements and virtual interpretation of this junk painting, which has conveyed both transcultural diversity and virtual artistic interpretation nowadays.

Methodology

In this paper, I would like to analyze the paintings of Kuo, Hsueh-Hu using the theories of visual analysis and explore the in-depth meanings of the symbols in his paintings. Using visual textual analysis with the iconological theory of Erwin Panofsky, the research provides an in-depth analysis of transcultural symbols in Kuo Hsueh-Hu's art. According to Erwin Panofsky, the principles of iconology include three stages: in the first stage of "pre-iconographical description," "primary of natural subject matter," subdivided into factual and expressional. As for the formal elements, the factual or formal elements will be examined, including colors, lines, constitution, proportions, scale, light and shadow, etc. The world of pure forms, thus recognized as carriers of primary or natural meanings, may be called the world of artistic motifs. An enumeration of these motifs would be a pre-iconographical description of the work of art (Panofsky, 1955).

In the first stage of pre-iconographical description, the formal elements and principles of composition are examined. There are some basic elements, such as line, space, and value, which are degrees of light and dark in a design. Shapes are created when lines are combined to form a square, triangle, or circle. Forms are three-dimensional shapes with length, width, and depth. The texture is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. In the second stage of "iconography," secondary or conventional subject matter will be examined for further analysis

of the visual subject. The researcher will collect a particular theme of images, interpreting the development of images in historical contexts. In doing this, we connect artistic motifs and combinations of artistic motifs (compositions) with themes or concepts. Moreover, in the third stage of "iconology," based on the first and the second stages of analysis, we will find out intrinsic meaning or content from the frameworks of social, cultural, historical, and the artist's distinctive traits, giving a systematic interpretation of his creative and unique styles, which reflect the profound meanings of the cultural, historical and humanitarian impulses of his time. "It is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion—qualified by one personality and condensed into one work." These principles are manifested by, and therefore throw light on, both "compositional methods" and "iconographical significance" (Panofsky, 1955).

Junks, therefore, in the first stage of pre-iconographical analysis, are traditional East Asian sailing vessels distinguished by their balanced proportions, flat-bottomed hulls, and battened sails. Their form emphasizes both functionality and visual harmony. The broad beam provides stability, while the high stern and pronounced bow create a distinctive silhouette. Segmented sails supported by horizontal battens produce a rhythmic geometric pattern that contributes to the vessel's aesthetic character. Internal bulkheads strengthen the structure and improve seaworthiness. The relationship between hull, mast, and sail demonstrates an integrated design adapted to maritime environments. Collectively, these elements reveal a sophisticated synthesis of engineering, navigation, craftsmanship, and cultural expression. Additionally, in the second stage of iconography, junk boats embody centuries of maritime exchange across East and Southeast Asia, serving as vehicles of trade, migration, and cultural interaction. Historically, their development reflects Chinese naval innovation and adaptation to diverse coastal environments. From a transcultural perspective, junk boats function as mobile spaces where technologies, commodities, and cultural practices intersected across regional networks. Applying Panofsky's iconological method, the vessel may be interpreted beyond its physical form as a symbolic expression of maritime connectivity and cultural memory. As Erwin Panofsky argues, deeper cultural meanings emerge through historical context, revealing junk boats as enduring symbols of exchange, mobility, and transcultural encounter. Therefore, in the third stage of iconological analysis, in this paper I will explore and highlight the profound meanings of junk boats from the perspectives of transcultural theories.

Junk as the Transcultural Contact Zone

Junks were regarded as cargo carriers and vessels of transportation from the 15th century to the decline in the 1940s, with the rise of steam engines and steamboats in modern times. Port cities are usually thought of as the contact zone of transcultural transmission and translation, where migrants, residents, and travelers exchange goods, languages, and messages, creating a new dynamic of cultural exchange.

Here, I would like to extend this theory a little further and assume that the junks are exactly the contact zone of cultural transmission and translation, where fishermen, merchants, stowaways, and passengers exchange transnational goods, exotic languages, and translation; news and messages cross seas. Junks are the first space and location of transcultural translation, transmission and transformation, a new site where humans create new identities of hybridity because "the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' and 'hybridity' is the sign of productivity of colonial power" (Bhabha, 1994). In other words, junks have become a new space and site of transcultural transformation, where migrants create new

cultural translation and new identities of hybridity because "the migrants' survival depends on translation of cultural difference." That is, junk has become the "third space" of transcultural transformation for migrants in the context of globalization.

Moreover, the theme of "crossing" is the keynote of the visual story, which closely interconnects the three exhibited paintings. Crossing as a theme or motif in Kuo Hsueh-Hu's art is well illustrated by his paintings of junk boats on the Tamsui River. It can be traced back to the artist's childhood, when he was fascinated by the hustle and bustle of trading scenes on boats on the river. He still remembered the strange smells and odors of the goods intermingling with a variety of dried herbs, tea leaves, fish, and other goods on junk boats in some lines of his memoirs. In his later years, he traveled across Southeast Asia and even stayed in San Francisco. The theme of "crossing" was one of his motifs for his creation. Therefore, junk boats have become the symbol of diaspora, an eternal nostalgia for the homeland and for childhood memories.

Transcultural Elements in *Colorful Boats on the Tamsui River*

The painting *Colorful Boats on the Tamsui River* presents a clearer depiction of the layered contours and details of Guanyin Mountain. In this painting, Kuo Hsueh-Hu successfully depicted junk boats laden with cargo on the Tamsui River, where merchants conducted business at nearby ports. "Chinese ships—'junks', as the Europeans called them—crossed the Bay of Bengal, as they had long crossed the South China Sea." These junks were built with "flat bottoms for shallow waters and a keel that could be lowered for deep-sea voyages" (Armith, 2013). Near Guanyin Mountain, the effect of swirling clouds and mist creates a sense of visual depth. The three junks, positioned at the visual focal point, have their hulls changed from back to white, with the first boat on the right painted closer, enlarging it and making the cargo hold and goods clearly visible, creating a foreground; the middle boat serves as the midground, accompanied by another boat, while a small sailing boat in the distance on the left served as the background. In terms of visual movement, the boat on the right seems to be advancing towards the viewer, as if it is about to reach the shore. Kuo Hsueh-Hu has slightly adjusted the layout of the boats, presenting a more rhythmic sense of progression, with richer layers of waves, making the overall scene more vivid and lifelike.

This depiction of junks showcases the important landscapes of northern Taiwan, including the Tamsui River and Guanyin Mountain. In Taiwan's trade history, junks have gradually declined, being replaced by steamships and larger cargo vessels as international trade flourished. Junks have become a symbol of past transnational trade and cross-cultural exchange. In addition, I would like to extend the theory of contact zone a little bit to the junks as the sites cultural translation, transmission and transformation, a living theater where merchants, fishermen, passengers and tourists interplay with diverse languages and dialects, with exotic goods and clothes, and with cultural differences. That is, junks have become the "Third Space" by Homi K. Bhabha, which "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha, 1994). And the junk boats have become the transcultural contact zone for cultural translation and transmission.

Figure 1
Colorful Boats on Tamsui River *Gouache Painting by Kuo Hsueh-Hu, 1982*



Source: Kuo Hsueh Hu Foundation

Virtual Soundscape and Interactive Space in *Three States of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's Home Gazing*

In this virtual reality exhibition by Hsin-Chien Huang, I would like to elaborate on the artwork's triple perspectives created in the virtual space. In the virtual space, diverse narratives and dialogues are created because "virtual reality storytelling is not about controlling the viewer's gaze but about designing attention through space" (Bucher, 2018). This virtual reality artwork *Three States of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's Home Gazing* by Hsin-Chien, Huang interpreted Kuo's three paintings: *The Setting Sun by the Fort Provintia* in Tainan, *Colorful Boats on Tamsui River*, and *The Festival on South Street* in Taipei; these three paintings were recreated into three parts of this story: the State of Mind, the Gazed and the Enchanted. In the second scene *The Gazed*, which is based on the junk painting, the viewers can see the junk boats crossing the wavy ocean, the viewer gazes at the beautiful blue waves and the blue sky, a fantastic landscape of the Taiwanese Straits. The seagulls flew high and low, crossing the painting's framework.

Figure 2
Three States of States of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's Home Gazing *Virtual Artwork by Hsin-Chien Huang, 2020*



Source: Hsin-Chien Huang

In this virtual scene of junk boats, the artist arranged the violin music of the traditional Taiwanese folk song "The Sunset on Tamui River" written by Yen Chun Lin and sung by the singer Hung Yi-Fung in 1957 to the scene, which dramatically added a touch of nostalgia in

ancient Taiwan and brought cultural diversity to the scene. The calling of seagulls and the crashing of sea waves bring immersive vividity to the scene, which invites the viewers to immerse themselves on the junk boast on Tamsui river. The effects of soundscape are successfully highlighted with the arrangement of the folk song and natural sounds in real natural environment. Moreover, the viewers can watch the sea waves flapping and the boats moving forward, surrounded by natural landscape and soundscape. Such an immersive effect is so dramatic that the viewers seem to really step into the real scene of the original static painting. And this is also the dramatic approach to draw more attention of young viewers and invite them to the story of ancient art history of Taiwan. With the new technology of virtual reality, the gouache painting revived again with more immersive soundscape in the 3-D digital space, extending the viewers' imagination to full extent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper showcases the transcultural hybridity and virtual interaction of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's gouache painting and Hsin-Chien, Huang's virtual reality exhibition based on Kuo's gouache paintings. In this way, the artwork's diverse, interactive, and multi-narrative aspects are highlighted, inviting the artist Kuo Hsueh-Hu, the directors, and viewers to co-fabricate. The time and space of the original painting is extended to a more 3D-dimensional imaginative space where the inspiring dialogues between the viewers and the artists occur. Moreover, the production of a virtual reality exhibition of Kuo Hsueh-Hu's artworks aimed to embrace a diversity of virtual narratives, deepen understanding of the artist's work, and engage viewers for future generations. In addition, from the perspective of preserving the artist's work with digital creation and cultural archives, virtual reality and new technological methods are inspiring approaches to adopt for the storage of the precious paintings as well.

Additionally, Kuo Hsueh-Hu fully depicted his nostalgia for the homeland and junk has become his symbol of diaspora and transcultural crossing, a metaphor of self-identity in the world literary space, which fully exhibited the unique locality of Taiwanese landscape and the transformation of self-identity from a colonized citizen of Japan, a painter bewildered by controversies on the genre of the nationality in Taiwan to a world traveler with nostalgia of homeland in postmodern times. Junks, which shift from carrying cargo, crossing seas to conveying cultural diversity, have become the contact zone of cultural translation, transmission and self-transformation. In addition to the artistic form, the virtual narratives of Hsin-Chien Huang also add another profound interpretation of modernity nowadays. Most important of all, this paper aims to explore and interpret Kuo Hsueh-Hu's artwork and contribute to the reconstruction of the Taiwanese art history since Japanese colonial period through transcultural perspective and virtual reality interpretation. As the only gouache artist developing a series of junk paintings in colonial Taiwan, Kuo Hsueh-Hu not only successfully conveys the transcultural elements in colonial Taiwan but also incorporates the spirits of crossing and searching in his junk paintings. With the new virtual interpretation of Hsin-Chien Huang, the junk painting has dramatically transformed into a magical interactive space for future generation to renavigate and reimagine the Taiwanese art odyssey.

Acknowledgements

Sincerely thanks for the photo courtesy of Kuo Hsueh-Hu Foundation and the artist Hsin-Chien Huang.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Developing a Conceptual Framework of Threadvertising Branding: The Case of *Peg O' My Heart* (2025)

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study develops a conceptual framework of Threadvertising Branding, a new form of storytelling-based brand communication that integrates narrative immersion, platform affordances, and audience engagement on Threads, Meta's emerging text-based social platform. Using the 2025 Hong Kong film *Peg O' My Heart (贖夢)* as a case study, the research examines how the production team constructed a film character persona, Choi San Keung, to connect cinematic narrative with real-time social interaction. The campaign began when a post by a supposed netizen appeared on Threads, showing a candid photo of Choi San Keung sleeping on the MTR. Whether this post was an organic encounter, or a coordinated marketing act remained deliberately ambiguous, heightening public curiosity. Shortly after, Choi San Keung, through his Threads account, uploaded a series of late-night voice recordings and posts that blurred the boundary between fiction and reality. Over the next two weeks, this diegetic storytelling approach built emotional connection and intrigue before the official trailer was released. Subsequent events, including a face-to-face nightmare-sharing session, further encouraged audience participation and deepened the sense of co-presence with the character. Through this integrated strategy, the advertising campaign demonstrated how Threadvertising can function as pre-launch promotion, participatory narrative, and community-building mechanism. The film's eventual box office success underscores the cultural and commercial potential of such hybrid branding practices. This paper synthesizes insights from transmedia storytelling, participatory culture, and digital branding theories to propose a conceptual framework of Threadvertising Branding.

Keywords: threadvertising, transmedia storytelling, social media branding, participatory culture, Hong Kong cinema

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Introduction

The landscape of social media branding has undergone a significant transformation with the emergence of text-centric, conversational platforms such as Threads. While visual-heavy ecosystems like Instagram and TikTok have dominated digital marketing for the past decade, their saturation with high-production advertisements has led to a phenomenon known as ad blindness, where users instinctively ignore promotional content. This creates a critical research gap in understanding how non-paid, authentic social spaces can be utilized for deep narrative immersion before traditional advertising models become prevalent. Current digital communication theories frequently focus on visual aesthetics, leaving the strategic potential of text-based ambient awareness largely unexplored.

The primary objective of this research is to propose the "Threadvertising" branding framework, a hybrid branding practice that integrates transmedia storytelling with real-time participatory culture. By analyzing the Choi San Keung campaign for the Hong Kong film *Peg O' My Heart* (2025), this study evaluates how specific platform affordances, such as high-organic-reach algorithms and conversational text, were utilized to build a persistent digital presence. This campaign occurred during a unique 2025 window when Threads was perceived as a sanctuary for authentic and non-paid interaction. This research holds significance for both the Hong Kong film industry and broader digital communication theory by providing a model for character-driven branding that prioritizes diegetic integrity over polished commercial production.

Literature Review

Narrative Transportation and the Power of Realistic Narratives

Narrative transportation refers to the psychological state where individuals become so mentally immersed in a story that they experience a loss of self-awareness and increased emotional engagement with the narrative characters (Thomas & Grigsby, 2024). Recent research suggests that the effectiveness of this process on social media is significantly influenced by the narrative's realism. Can et al. (2025) argue that realistic fictional narratives are more potent than traditional fantasy narratives in fostering brand loyalty and attachment, as they align more closely with the user's everyday social reality. In the context of viral advertising, this immersion is further amplified by paratextual features, such as real-time likes and comments, which act as social cues that validate the story's authenticity (Seo et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2026).

Participatory Culture and the Authenticity of "Small Stories"

The digital landscape has transformed consumers into active "prosumers" who co-create brand meaning within a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2014; Jones et al., 2025). This participation is often anchored in what Georgakopoulou (2022) describes as "small stories," which are defined as fragmented and everyday narrative snippets that emphasize spontaneity and authenticity over polished production. On microblogging platforms, these incremental updates facilitate ambient awareness, allowing audiences to develop a coherent mental model of a digital persona through constant exposure to social information (Leonardi, 2015; Levordashka & Utz, 2016). When these small stories are deployed effectively, they bypass the audience's skepticism toward hard-sell marketing and encourage collaborative storytelling (Boeck et al., 2025; Kasemsarn & Nickpour, 2025).

The Emergence and Affordances of Threads: A New Social Micro-ecosystem

The launch of Threads in 2023 represents a unique evolutionary path in social media history as it was birthed directly from an existing parent platform, Instagram (Zhang et al., 2025). While Instagram remains a visually driven environment centered on lifestyle and fashion, Threads has emerged as a text-centric microblogging platform that fosters higher engagement with topical and discursive content (Zhang et al., 2025). This structural shift creates distinct platform affordances that prioritize real-time dialogue and text-based intimacy over polished visual production. The migration of users from a visual-dominant platform to a text-heavy one allows for ambient awareness, where users develop a sense of digital closeness through constant exposure to fragmented updates (Leonardi, 2015; Levordashka & Utz, 2016). Within this unique micro-ecosystem, Threadvertising operates as a strategic branding practice that leverages high-organic-reach algorithms and voice notes affordances to create non-intrusive, personality-driven narratives. By prioritizing perceived authenticity over traditional high-production advertising, Threadvertising effectively blurs the line between organic user content and commercial promotion.

The Ontology of Persona: Navigating the Fine Line Between Person and Character

A critical challenge in character-driven digital marketing is maintaining the diegetic integrity of the persona. Torrego et al. (2021) highlight the fine line between the actual person and their digital persona, noting that audience engagement often hinges on the deliberate blurring of these boundaries. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements that are often perceived as non-diegetic intrusions, dedicated character accounts function as real but fictional entities (Huang, 2023). This distinction is vital; while celebrity-led promotions may trigger narrative breaks due to the audience's awareness of the actor's commercial intent, a consistently maintained fictional persona can navigate the digital space as a social peer, utilizing language play and platform-specific codes to establish a credible digital presence (Virginio et al., 2025).

Para-Social Interaction and Transmedia Emotional Labor

The long-term success of digital personas is deeply rooted in para-social interaction (PSI), where users develop one-sided emotional bonds with fictional characters (Mrad et al., 2025). These relationships are characterized by high levels of empathy and social comparison, often manifesting in users providing real-life advice or emotional support to the persona (Diao et al., 2025). Furthermore, when these narratives are integrated into a transmedia storytelling framework in which the story world expands across multiple platforms, they create a sense of gothic echoes and psychological depth that resonate with contemporary audiences (Torres-Toukoumidis et al., 2024). This emotional labor performed by the audience ensures that the narrative is not merely consumed but is actively sustained as a shared cultural ritual.

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative netnographic approach to investigate the intricate dynamics of audience engagement and narrative construction within the digital ecosystem of Threads. Netnography is particularly advantageous for this study because it facilitates the immersive observation of naturally occurring social interactions and symbolic meanings within online communities while minimizing the intrusive presence often associated with traditional

ethnographic methods (Kozinets, 2015). By focusing on the Choi San Keung campaign for the film *Peg O' My Heart* (2025), this methodology allows for a nuanced examination of how text-centric affordances and character-driven narratives influence user perceptions of authenticity on Threads. The research design is structured to capture the longitudinal evolution of audience behavior over a 107-day period, ensuring that both the immediate viral reactions and the sustained long-term loyalty are accounted for within the analytical framework.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research corpus comprises a longitudinal dataset from the @choi_san_keung Threads account, spanning from March 4 to August 15, 2025. Out of 119 initial entries, 116 posts were validated for analysis while three posts related to unrelated marketing campaigns were excluded. Data collection involved the systematic archiving of textual content, metadata, and timestamps alongside 116 associated visual assets. Descriptive transcripts were developed for all voice posts to capture verbal content and paralinguistic features including tone, pauses, and ambient noise. Furthermore, quantitative engagement metrics such as Likes, Comments, Reposts, and View counts were recorded to identify patterns of virality. A purposive subset of interactional data was also extracted from user comments to capture the specific dialogues between the character, celebrities, and general users.

The study utilizes a mixed methods framework to synthesize the gathered data through quantitative and qualitative lenses. Quantitative engagement analysis employed descriptive statistics and time series mapping to pinpoint critical incidents, such as the viral MTR photograph in Post #16, while evaluating the correlation between post formats and engagement spikes. Simultaneously, an inductive thematic analysis was applied to textual and interactional data to identify linguistic markers of persona construction and diegetic blurring. This process specifically mapped the transition from narrative engagement to promotional calls to action. Finally, a multimodal semiotic analysis assessed the candid visual aesthetics and aural intimacy of the campaign. This qualitative evaluation explored how these semiotic signs leveraged specific platform affordances to foster authenticity and a sense of co-presence among the audience.

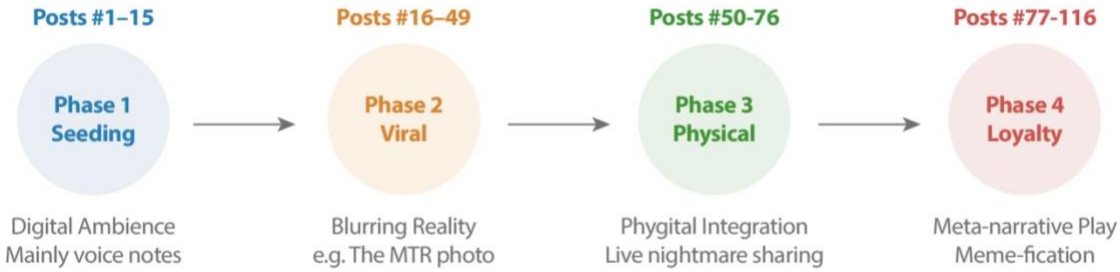
Case Description

The advertising campaign for the film *Peg O' My Heart* (2025) was anchored by a dedicated Threads account for the fictional persona Choi San Keung (@choi_san_keung; acted by the director of the film Nick Cheung. Spanning a total of 107 days from March 4 to June 18, 2025, the campaign utilized 116 valid posts across four chronological phases to construct a complex state of narrative immersion (see Figure 1). The first phase, which took place between March 4 and March 7, served as an initial seeding period where the account functioned as a private diary for an individual suffering from chronic insomnia and vivid nightmares. During this stage, the content relied heavily on cryptic text updates and raw voice recordings that established an unpolished digital persona. Because there was no overt mention of the motion picture, the account appeared to the general public as a regular user sharing personal psychological struggles.

A significant narrative shift occurred during phase two from March 8 to March 12, which acted as a catalyst for reality disruption. This stage was triggered by a viral stealth shot of the character on the MTR, which circulated widely among platform users. The persona's real-time response to this external leak disrupted the boundary between the fictional storyworld and the real social environment of the platform. The narrative tension escalated on March 12 when

another character from the film, Dr. Man, allegedly intervened by confiscating the phone and banning the persona from the application. This incident led to a four-day silence that became a primary focal point for audience speculation and investigative participation.

Figure 1
The Four-Phase Narrative Architecture of the Campaign



Following the account's restoration on March 16, the campaign entered phase three, which emphasized participatory expansion leading up to the film's preview screenings. This period focused on the "Nightmare Sharing Sessions" where the character invited followers to share their own anxieties and fears. These digital interactions culminated in a physical face-to-face event on March 21, translating the virtual experience into a live collective immersion. The final phase commenced on the film's official release date of March 27 and lasted for 84 days. The narrative shifted toward a meta-engagement style where the character provided daily, humorous excuses for being unable to attend screenings of his own film, effectively maintaining audience loyalty through persistent social presence.

The efficacy of this campaign was further bolstered by the participation of established celebrities with verified blue tick badges Threads accounts such as Tyson Yoshi and Denis Kwok, who interacted with the Choi's account as regular peers. These spontaneous interactions flattened the social hierarchy and reinforced the persona's presence within the local digital community. This stood in stark contrast to the involvement of actress Fala Chen, acting as Choi's wife in the film, whose use of a personal verified account created a narrative break. While Choi maintained his diegetic integrity by refusing to acknowledge the celebrity profile of his fictional wife, the audience demonstrated a clear preference for autonomous, persona-driven narratives over traditional celebrity-led promotion.

Findings and Analysis

Quantitative Trajectory and Strategic Phase Evolution

The engagement trajectory of the Choi San Keung campaign followed a non-linear pattern characterized by narrative-driven surges that correspond to specific strategic pivots. As illustrated in Figure 2, the campaign transitioned from a baseline of ambient awareness in Phase 1 to an explosive expansion in Phase 2. This transition was catalyzed by Post #16, featuring the MTR stealth shot, which triggered a nearly 77 percent increase in mean views to 370,294.1 and a surge in mean comments exceeding 2,000 percent (refer to Table 1). These quantitative milestones indicate that the blurring of physical and digital realities effectively bypassed audience skepticism, transforming passive observers into active investigators who disseminated the narrative across the platform (Seo et al., 2018).

Figure 2
Quantitative Engagement Trajectory and Narrative Spikes

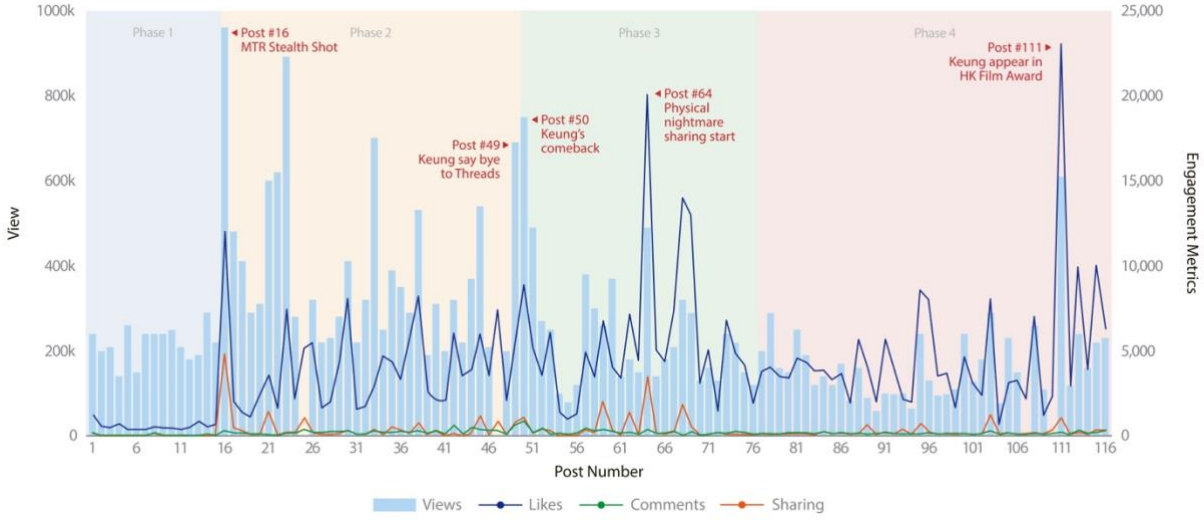


Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Engagement Metrics by Campaign Phase (Mean Values)

Metrics (Mean)	Phase 1 (Seeding)	Phase 2 (Viral)	Phase 3 (Physical)	Phase 4 (Loyalty)
No. of Posts	15	34	27	40
Duration (Days)	4	5	11	84
Views	209,333.3	**370,294.1**	245,185.2	161,725.0
Likes	579.7	4,064.9	**5,668.9**	4,642.2
Comments	11.3	**237.0**	175.7	102.5
Reposts	3.2	43.0	**52.7**	32.7
Shares	59.8	464.9	**504.1**	206.7

The subsequent narrative shift in Phase 3 represented the zenith of deep emotional immersion rather than broad reach. While total views moderated compared to the viral peak of Phase 2, high-quality engagement metrics including mean likes and mean reposts reached their peaks at 5,668.9 and 52.7 respectively. This divergence demonstrates a successful transition from algorithmic discovery to a participatory culture where the audience was emotionally invested in the narrative continuation (Jenkins, 2014). The high density of interactions during the nightmare-sharing sessions confirms that the story had become a form of social currency, allowing users to move from watching the character to sharing digital co-presence with him.

The final phase demonstrated a remarkable long-tail effect that sustained engagement for 84 days following the film's premiere. Despite the expected moderation in reach, the mean like count remained exceptionally high at 4,642.2, which surpassed the viral intensity of Phase 2. This sustained loyalty reflects the successful construction of digital closeness and a persistent social presence (Levordashka & Utz, 2016). The engagement reached a final peak at Post #111 (Nick Cheung dressed up as Choi to attend Hong Kong Film Award as an award presenter), where meta-narrative play regarding the character's identity provided the ultimate social

currency. Consequently, the audience continued to interact with Choi as a social peer rather than a marketing gimmick, maintaining community humor long after the initial novelty of the campaign had dissipated.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Exploration of Audience Immersion

The qualitative analysis of user comments provides robust evidence of narrative transportation where followers transitioned from skeptical observers to active narrative co-creators (see Table 2). Based on the thematic coding of primary posts, the engagement patterns can be categorized into three evolving layers of immersion which directly correspond to the six themes identified during the analysis. These layers reflect a progression from objective scrutiny to subjective intimacy and finally to collective narrative maintenance.

Table 2
Qualitative Thematic Evidence of Audience Engagement

Representative Quotes (English Translation)	Behavior Description	Theme/ Code	Theoretical Significance
"Looks like a scene from *Peg O' My Heart*," "The person in the photo looks too young for Nick Cheung."	Users attempt to debunk the mystery by analyzing visual details (skin, lighting).	**Investigative Participation**	**Controlled Ambiguity**: Unresolved mystery triggers high initial reach and organic discussion.
"Brother Keung, please see a doctor for your insomnia," "Wish you a speedy recovery, Keung."	Users treat the fictional persona as a real individual, offering health and emotional advice.	**Para-social Concern & Empathy**	**Para-social Interaction**: The digital persona fosters an emotional bond with users beyond mere advertising.
"I will call the police to arrest Dr. Man!" "Dr. Man, give back the phone to Choi!"	Users intervene in the fictional conflict by "fighting" against other characters (e.g., Dr. Man).	**Diegetic Boundary Negotiation**	**Diegetic Integrity**: Maintaining the narrative boundary encourages users to participate in the story's "rules."
"Brother Keung, I had a nightmare too," "This recording is a nightmare for all of us."	Users contribute their personal experiences (nightmares) to the character's thread.	**Collaborative Co-creation**	**Participatory Culture**: The audience transitions from passive consumers to active narrative contributors.
"Day 5: Another reason for not watching," "Let me guess: tomorrow's excuse will be 'I have to work. '"	Users turn the character's excuses into a daily game and predict future narrative turns.	**Memefication & Social Rituals**	**Social Currency**: Narrative elements become a shared cultural meme, sustaining long-term engagement.
"It must be Nick Cheung pretending to be Keung," "Why did you 'dream' about being at the film awards?"	Users knowingly play along with the "fictional" status, even when faced with the real actor.	**Meta-narrative Identity Play**	**Identity Negotiation**: The final blurring of actor and character provides the ultimate immersion and loyalty.

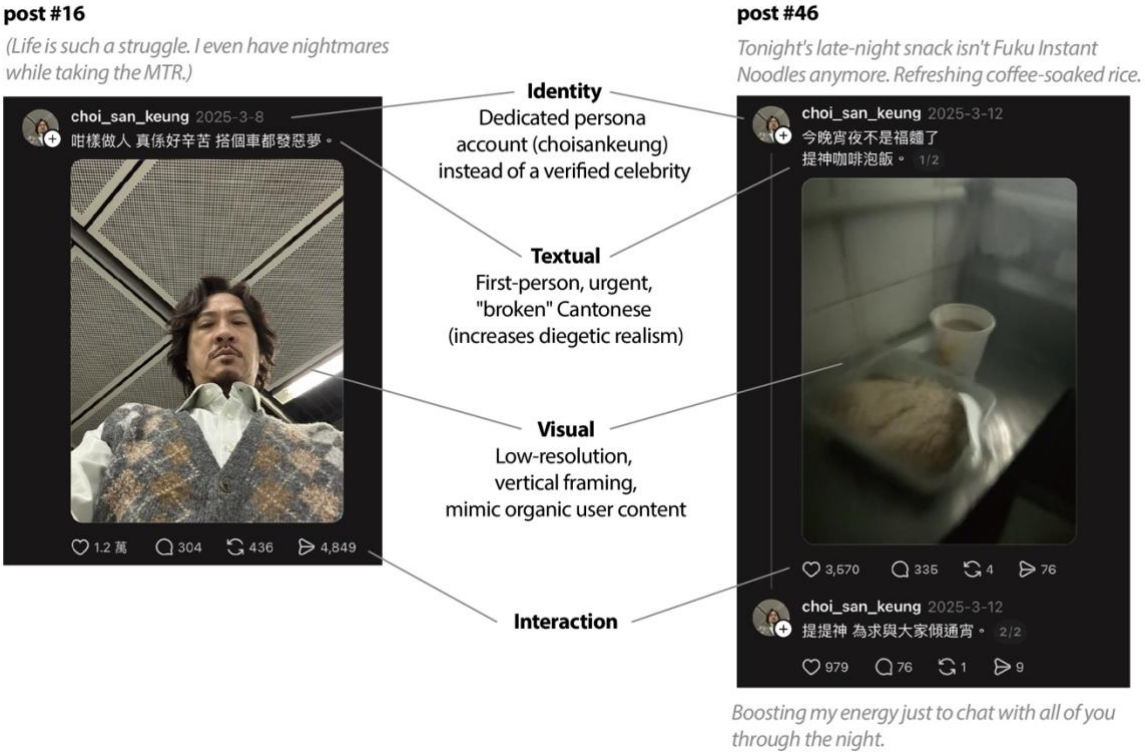
Authenticity Construction and Investigative Engagement

During the initial phase of the campaign, audience interactions were predominantly characterized by Investigative Participation directed toward the construction of narrative realism. As illustrated in the anatomy of a small story post (see Figure 3), users meticulously

analyzed paratextual features such as the character's skin texture and the specific subway lighting in Post #16 to verify his physical existence in the real world. According to the small stories theory proposed by Georgakopoulou (2022), these fragmented narrative snippets are fundamental to building digital authenticity because they mimic organic user behavior rather than polished commercial broadcasting.

Figure 3

Anatomy of Small Story Post-decoding Authenticity



Furthermore, users utilized platform affordances to corroborate the character's identity, suggesting that unpolished aesthetics possess a superior capacity to bypass audience skepticism. By aligning fictional elements with the everyday social reality of the user, the campaign successfully induced a state of immersion that validated the persona's presence before the formal plot unfolded. This initial stage established the necessary cognitive foundation for users to accept the fictional character as a tangible social entity within their digital environment.

Para-Social Intimacy and Ambient Digital Closeness

As the campaign progressed, the nature of audience engagement shifted from objective investigation to subjective intimacy, encompassing the themes of Para-social Concern & Empathy as well as Diegetic Boundary Negotiation. When the character shared personal struggles such as chronic insomnia or the diegetic crisis of having his phone confiscated by Dr. Man, the audience exhibited significant traits of para-social interaction. Instead of perceiving the character as a distant cinematic figure, users treated the fictional persona as a legitimate social peer by offering authentic health advice and emotional encouragement.

This manifestation of emotional labor indicates that constant exposure to fragmented updates fostered a state of ambient awareness among followers (Mrad et al., 2025). Consequently, the character was transformed into a familiar entity within the digital feeds of the users. The successful execution of diegetic boundary negotiation allowed the fictional narrative to coexist

with the real-time social interactions of the platform, thereby establishing a profound sense of digital closeness. The audience ceased to be mere spectators and began to perform the role of concerned companions, strengthening the relational bond between the brand persona and the consumer.

Collective Co-creation and Meta-Narrative Maintenance

The final stage of the campaign involved the execution of Meta-narrative Identity Play through the processes of Collaborative Cocreation and Memefication and Social Rituals. The audience fully embodied the participatory culture described by Jenkins (2014) by engaging in collective rituals such as tracking the character's daily excuses for avoiding cinema screenings. These excuses became a form of shared social currency that allowed users to participate in the narrative through humorous distribution and repetitive engagement within their own digital networks.

This engagement peaked during the Hong Kong Film Awards (Post #111) where the persona addressed the ongoing confusion regarding his identity as actor Nick Cheung. Rather than breaking the fictional frame, the audience knowingly reinforced the character's claim that the real-life actor on stage was merely an impostor. This collective reaction demonstrates a state of double consciousness, wherein users are fully aware of the material reality of the film promotion yet consciously choose to perform within the boundaries of the fictional world.

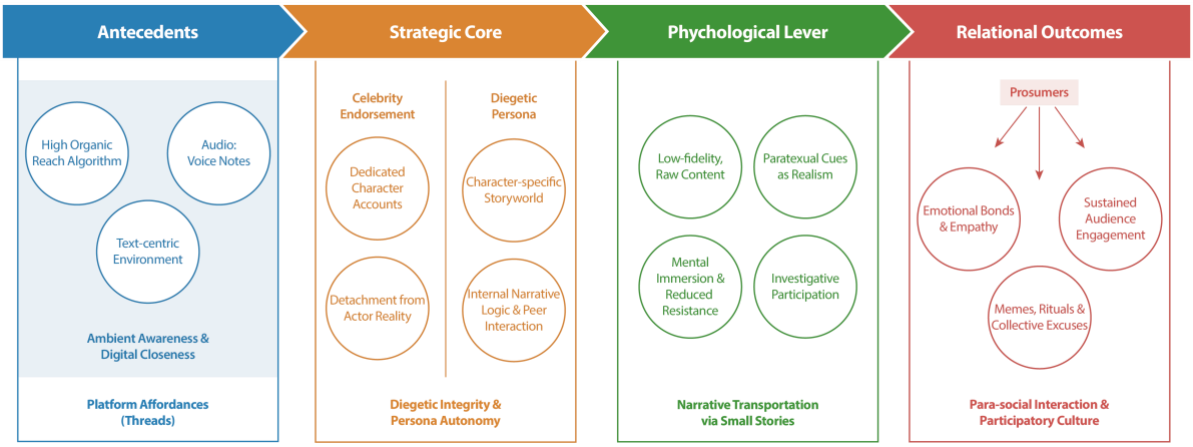
The audience actively performed the cognitive labor required to protect the diegetic integrity of the storyworld. For instance, user comments such as "Choi is the real star, the person on the film award stage is just an actor playing him" illustrate this playful ludic negotiation. Through this collaborative cocreation, users ceased to be passive consumers and instead transformed into narrative protectors who secured the survival of the persona beyond the commercial promotional cycle, marking the ultimate success of the Threadvertising framework.

Discussion: The Threadvertising Branding Framework

The Threadvertising Branding Framework is proposed as a comprehensive strategic model that integrates platform-specific functionalities with immersive narrative techniques to cultivate deep audience engagement. As illustrated in Figure 4, this framework consists of four interdependent dimensions that collectively bypass consumer resistance and foster long-term brand loyalty. The foundational level of the model relies on the unique structural properties of the Threads platform, which prioritizes text-centricity and voice note interactions to facilitate a psychological state of ambient awareness (Leonardi, 2015).

The empirical findings from the last section confirm that these platform affordances are the primary drivers of investigative participation. By utilizing fragmented updates that penetrate user feeds consistently, the campaign established a sense of digital closeness that traditional advertising cannot achieve. These affordances serve as the essential technological infrastructure that enables a fictional persona to establish a persistent social presence without the intrusive nature associated with commercial broadcasting. Consequently, the framework demonstrates that narrative transportation is most effective when the medium itself supports the perceived spontaneity of the story.

Figure 4
The Threadvertising Branding Framework



Diegetic Autonomy and the Semiotic Paradox of the Verified Badge

The strategic core of the proposed framework involves the maintenance of diegetic integrity through the utilization of dedicated character accounts rather than non-diegetic celebrity profiles. The comparative interaction between the persona of Choi and actress Fala Chen, as visualized in Figure 5, illustrates a critical paradox in modern digital branding. While traditional marketing heavily relies on celebrity social capital, the Threads ecosystem demands absolute diegetic autonomy to sustain user immersion. When Chen utilized her official verified account to interact with the character, the interaction triggered immediate narrative resistance from the audience.

This phenomenon highlights the semiotic paradox of the verified badge on text-centric platforms. Although the verified blue tick badge traditionally serves as an institutional marker of trust and authenticity in standard web environments, it underwent a semiotic inversion within the diegetic storyworld, where it was perceived as a non-diegetic intrusion. The presence of the verified badge functioned as an identity break that reminded the audience of the underlying commercial apparatus and the promotional nature of the campaign, which effectively collapsed the psychological state of narrative transportation.

The audience feedback regarding the badge as an out of character intrusion proves that modern social media users act as narrative protectors who prioritize internal narrative coherence over corporate validation. By detaching the fictional persona from the real-world identity of the actor, the narrative effectively avoids these structural breaks and allows the persona to interact as a legitimate social peer, thereby prioritizing perceived authenticity over traditional celebrity endorsement.

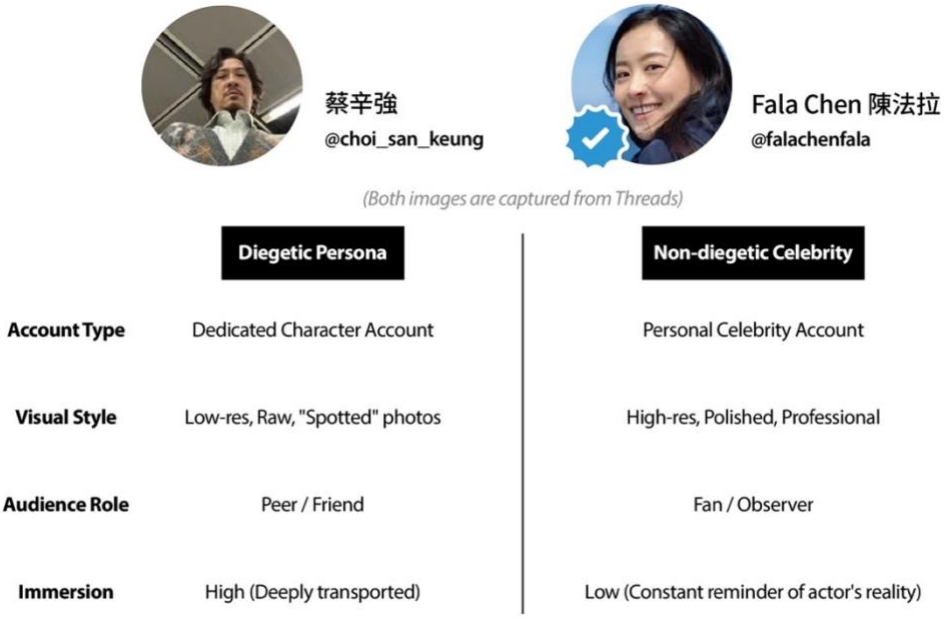
The Omnipresent Threat of Audience-Led Authenticity Audits

The strategic viability of this diegetic autonomy is further contingent upon the omnipresent threat of audience-led authenticity audits, which digital personas must constantly navigate in text-centric environments. Within the Threads ecosystem, the audience functions as active narrative protectors who continuously police the boundaries of the fictional space through rigorous textual and structural scrutiny. Had the production team of Choi San Keung deviated from the established low-fidelity aesthetic by uploading high-production drama stills or

utilizing conventional corporate marketing language, the diegetic illusion would have instantly collapsed.

Figure 5

Comparison on Diegetic Integrity: Choi San Keung vs. Fala Chen



This vulnerability proves that the success of the Threadvertising framework is highly contingent upon strict adherence to platform-specific behavioral codes and first-person mundane realism. The social capital generated within this framework is entirely derived from unpolished, organic interactions, such as raw late-night voice notes, which stand in direct opposition to traditional commercial marketing collateral. Consequently, the audience is always poised to initiate an authenticity audit at the slightest non-diegetic infraction. When a campaign fails to sustain these native behavioral expectations, user engagement abruptly reverts to a cynical awareness of commercial exploitation, thereby rendering the maintenance of flawless diegetic autonomy the primary prerequisite for sustainable social branding.

From Para-Social Intimacy to Collective Co-creation

The ultimate objective of the proposed framework is the cultivation of a participatory culture wherein the audience transitions from passive spectators to active digital prosumers. According to the foundational theories of prosumerism introduced by Toffler (2022) and subsequently expanded into digital ecosystems by Ritzer et al. (2012), the boundaries between production and consumption become entirely blurred on modern interactive platforms. The empirical findings regarding the Choi San Keung campaign suggest that parasocial intimacy acts as a vital catalyst for this prosumerist transition. As users offer health advice and emotional empathy, they move beyond mere content consumption and begin to perform emotional labor, which represents the initial stage of narrative co-production.

This relational outcome culminates in collective cocreation, whereby prosumers actively generate secondary narrative content and memes that becomes integrated into the broader storyworld. Rather than focusing merely on narrative protection, this level of engagement operates as a vehicle for individual and collective identity construction. By interacting with the digital persona, prosumers generate social currency within their own peer networks, utilizing

the character's localized Cantonese humor and fictional dilemmas to perform their own cultural capital.

Consequently, the campaign ceases to operate as a top-down commercial broadcast and instead evolves into a bottom-up community ritual. The user generated replies, speculative theories, and humorous excuse sharing sessions effectively distribute the brand narrative across decentralized networks. This transition proves that digital prosumption is a highly active relational negotiation, wherein the audience derives personal social value from maintaining the narrative reality, thereby ensuring long term brand resonance.

Structural Volatility and the Technological Adaptability of Personas

The strategic viability of these prosumerist rituals is, however, deeply contingent upon the micro level technological infrastructure of the host platform. This systemic vulnerability was vividly demonstrated by the recent decision of Meta to remove voice note functionalities on Threads, which presents a vital lesson regarding platform dependency in transmedia branding. Within text centric communication environments, voice messages play a singular role in bridging the gap between spoken intimacy and written textuality. As Melzner et al. (2023) observe, digital voice messages introduce a form of media orality that transmits crucial paralinguistic cues, including vocal tone, sighs, and ambient background noises, which dramatically enhance perceived physical presence and digital closeness.

The sudden loss of such audio affordances highlights the omnipresent threat of platform volatility, indicating that future iterations of the Threadvertising model must remain highly adaptable. When technical features are stripped away, transmedia digital personas must utilize linguistic and pragmatic compensation strategies to substitute for lost physical cues. According to the principles of cyberpragmatics articulated by Yus (2011), digital writers can effectively simulate physical presence through compensatory typographic and lexical strategies.

Specifically, future personas can deploy localized linguistic vernaculars, including Cantonese colloquial final particles such as la (啦), ga (㗎), or wo (喎), to maintain conversational authenticity. Furthermore, the strategic use of bracketed metatextual indicators, including environmental descriptions such as (heavy traffic noise) or physiological cues such as (sighs deeply), can recreate the sensory context previously delivered by raw audio files. By utilizing these text-based substitutions, a persona can sustain a persistent physical and emotional presence, ensuring that the brand narrative remains highly immersive despite the structural volatility of host platforms.

Conclusion

This research confirms that diegetic integrity serves as the fundamental driver of deep audience immersion within social media narratives. The longitudinal analysis of the Choi San Keung campaign demonstrates a distinct transition from mere algorithmic visibility to the cultivation of sustained emotional loyalty. By utilizing the proposed Threadvertising framework, practitioners can align platform affordances, diegetic autonomy, and narrative transportation to successfully cultivate a vibrant participatory culture. These dimensions work in synergy to transform passive spectators into prosumers who actively execute prosumerist collective cocreation. Within this text centric ecosystem, these users function as narrative protectors who constantly perform the cognitive labor required to protect the internal logic of the storyworld

through rigorous authenticity audits, thereby converting narrative coherence into shared social currency.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that autonomous, character driven accounts possess a superior capacity for bypassing commercial resistance compared to traditional celebrity social capital, which frequently triggers narrative resistance through identity breaks. Although the specific execution of such campaigns must remain flexible in the face of structural platform volatility, such as the sudden removal of specific auditory affordances, the underlying psychological mechanisms of narrative transportation remain constant. Future campaigns can withstand these technological shifts through the strategic deployment of linguistic personification and textual compensatory strategies to maintain digital closeness.

Future research should investigate the integration of generative artificial intelligence in maintaining these digital personas, specifically examining how automated systems can sustain diegetic consistency across increasingly complex transmedia landscapes. Furthermore, inquiries into the psychological impact of AI driven ambient presence would provide valuable insights into the next phase of human machine interaction within the context of digital branding. This study ultimately provides a foundational model for understanding the evolving boundaries between fiction and reality in the modern era of relational storytelling.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares the use of QuillBot, an AI-assisted writing tool, solely to proofread and refine the manuscript's language by correcting grammar, spelling, and improving clarity. No other AI technologies were used in preparing this work. All research ideas, design, findings, and analyses are original and based on the author's own efforts. After using QuillBot, the author carefully reviewed and edited the manuscript, taking full responsibility for its content. The tool was only used to enhance language, as English is not the author's first language.

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From Marks to Meaning: A Mixed-Methods Study on Visual Journals in Technique-Driven Art Courses

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of visual journaling as a tool for evaluating and monitoring student development in a Basic Drawing Techniques course within the BFA in Visual Communication program. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess how visual journaling supports skill progression, higher-order thinking, and reflective practice. Qualitative data were collected from weekly journal entries, instructor observations, and rubric-based assessments, while quantitative data were derived from a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring students' perceptions of the validity and usefulness of visual journaling, with all 30 enrolled students included through total population sampling. The findings revealed consistent improvement in technical skills across graphite/charcoal, pen and ink, and colored pencil techniques, supported by both rubric scores and self-reported student perceptions. Thematic analysis further identified key patterns of self-awareness, skill progression, confidence development, and self-regulation, indicating the enhancement of critical thinking and reflective practice. Survey results also showed high levels of agreement regarding the usefulness of visual journaling in monitoring progress, increasing engagement, and serving as a valid alternative to traditional assessment methods. Overall, the study concludes that visual journaling is an effective pedagogical and assessment strategy that supports both technical and cognitive development, promotes reflective and learner-centered practices aligned with outcomes-based education, and offers a meaningful alternative to conventional evaluation methods in studio-based art education.

Keywords: visual journaling, skill progression, reflective practice, studio-based art education, outcomes-based education

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Introduction

Studio-based art education foregrounds experiential learning and technical mastery, privileging process-oriented practice over lecture-driven instruction. Within the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) major in Visual Communication, Drawing Techniques functions as a foundational course in which students develop essential competencies such as line control, value rendering, texture, proportion, and perspective through guided demonstrations and sustained hands-on engagement. This pedagogical orientation aligns with the broader expectations of studio practice, where learning emerges through iterative making, critique, and reflection.

In the Philippine higher education context, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has institutionalized a paradigm shift toward Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) for Fine Arts and Design programs through CMO No. 43, s. 2017. This policy articulates program outcomes that emphasize critical and creative thinking, visual literacy, technical and technological competence, and professional ethics, while advocating for learner-centered curricula, model syllabi, and delivery strategies that document and ensure the attainment of these outcomes (Commission on Higher Education, 2017). Complementarily, CHED CMO No. 46, s. 2012 establishes a national quality assurance framework grounded in OBE and typology, underscoring the alignment of institutional systems—from planning and implementation to review and enhancement—with intended learning outcomes and continuous quality improvement (Commission on Higher Education, 2012). Taken together, these directives provide a strong basis for reflective, process-oriented assessment approaches in studio-based courses.

Reflective practices, such as art journaling and portfolio assessment, have been widely recognized as effective mechanisms for enabling students to monitor their development and meaningfully engage with their artistic growth (Negoiță, 2025). Visual journaling, in particular, integrates sketches, technical exercises, annotations, and reflective writing, offering a practical and structured means to operationalize CHED's OBE directives in technique-driven contexts. By documenting iterative practices alongside metacognitive reflections, visual journals serve as evidence of learning trajectories and provide a basis for formative feedback. As Williams and Shields (2025) emphasize, visual journals function as reflective learning tools that foster the active and purposeful exploration of artistic media and imagery, thereby deepening the learning process.

Empirical research further substantiates the pedagogical value of journaling in art education. In a mixed-methods study involving twelve third-year undergraduate art education students in Thailand, Sangvanich and Chinokul (2018) found that journals facilitated processes of observation, comparison, and critical analysis across different educational settings. Students utilized sketchbooks not only to document art activities but also to reflect on spatial organization, instructional design, and institutional practices encountered during field visits. In this context, the sketchbook evolved into a multidimensional reflective tool that integrated diverse artistic techniques with theoretical application, diagramming, and mind mapping, highlighting the interconnectedness of practice and conceptual understanding.

Beyond the development of technical and cognitive skills, art education also contributes to personal and socio-emotional growth. As Batič et al. (2025) argue, "art allows us to look within ourselves, to learn who we are and what interests us." Artistic practice encourages learners to engage with their thoughts, emotions, and perceptions, enabling them to evaluate their work, consider alternative perspectives, set goals, and regulate their creative processes. These

experiences strengthen social-emotional competencies and reinforce the holistic role of art education in cultivating both artistic proficiency and personal development.

Within this study, visual journaling is conceptualized as a reflective learning journal that actively incorporates artistic media and visual exploration into the documentation process (Williams & Shields, 2025). The journaling activities are anchored in a semester-long engagement with media-specific techniques, including graphite and charcoal (e.g., hatching, scumbling, blending), pen and ink (e.g., parallel hatching and scumbling), and colored pencil (e.g., hatching, scumbling, blending, and burnishing). These technical exercises are embedded within weekly demonstrations and studio tasks, with students recording process notes, challenges, and reflections on their learning strategies.

Central to this approach is the concept of self-regulation, understood as a social-cognitive process that integrates metacognition, motivation, and behavior in the pursuit of learning goals. Self-regulation encompasses how individuals conceptualize, initiate, and sustain goal-directed actions, and it is critical for behavioral change across contexts (Frazier et al., 2021). Through the integration of reflective journaling and technical practice, students are encouraged to monitor their progress, adjust their strategies, and engage in sustained, purposeful learning.

Overall, the study positions visual journaling as both a pedagogical strategy and an assessment tool that aligns with CHED's OBE framework. By bridging reflective practice and technical skill development, visual journals not only document student learning but also foster critical thinking, creative exploration, and socio-emotional growth within studio-based art education

Problem Statement

In technique-driven courses such as *Drawing Techniques*, assessment poses a persistent challenge. While studio critiques and product-oriented rubrics are widely used, they often privilege final outputs over the iterative processes of skill acquisition and reflective growth. Traditional critiques and juries are widely used as formal evaluation, often at the final stage, and can be threatening or negatively experienced by students, sometimes undermining learning (Biswas & Saha, 2024). Summative examinations, which are common in other academic disciplines, are difficult to formulate in drawing courses because the focus lies on hands-on practice, technical mastery, and experiential learning rather than discrete, testable knowledge. This creates a gap in reliably documenting both technical development and metacognitive growth. There is thus a need to evaluate whether visual journals, kept weekly and anchored on explicit prompts, can serve as a process-sensitive assessment tool that (a) captures skill progression, (b) cultivates critical thinking and self-reflection, and (c) provides valid and useful evidence for monitoring student learning trajectories.

The Purpose of the Study

1. Assess skill progression documented in journals across graphite/charcoal, pen and ink, and colored pencil techniques.
2. Determine how journaling fosters higher-order thinking, including critical analysis, evaluation, planning, and reflective practice (metacognition and self-regulation).
3. Evaluate student perceptions of the validity and usefulness of journaling as an alternative to summative exams, using a Likert-scale instrument.
4. Identify recurring themes and patterns in reflections and visual outputs that indicate learning trajectories, challenges, and the integration of theory with practice.

Methodology

A mixed-methods design was used, integrating qualitative and quantitative strands under an action-research orientation. The instructor implemented the journaling strategy, observed outcomes, and iteratively refined delivery within normal classroom practice.

Participants and Sampling Method

Participants comprised 30 BFA Visual Communication students enrolled in the sole section of BFA 101. The study employed total population sampling, as all students in the class who underwent the intervention were included in the study cohort. Total population sampling is this census approach applied to a clearly defined target group: instead of choosing a sample, the researcher studies all eligible units in that population frame (Turner, 2020).

Data Gathering Procedure

Data was collected throughout the semester using three sources: visual journal; instructor observations and rubric-based assessments; and questionnaire.

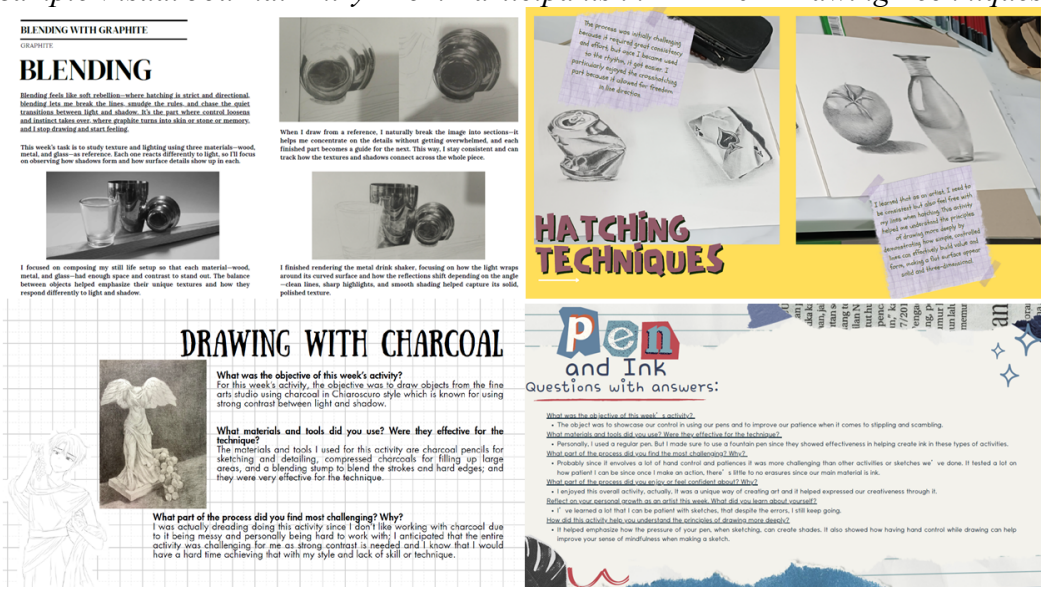
Visual Journal

For every lesson and hands-on activity, students produced a journal entry comprising:

- Process documentation (photos/images of themselves working and of progressive artwork stages).
- Structured reflection prompts (answered each week concisely):
    - What was the objective of this week's activity?
    - What materials and tools did you use? Were they effective for the technique?
    - What part of the process did you find most challenging? Why?
    - What part of the process did you enjoy or feel confident about?
    - Reflect on your personal growth as an artist this week. What did you learn about yourself?
    - How did this activity help you understand the principles of drawing more deeply?

Figure 1

Sample Visual Journal Entry From Participants in BFA 101 Drawing Techniques



Instructor Observations and Rubric-Based Assessments

The instructor monitored progress during demonstrations and practice, providing formative feedback. The rubric assessed technical skill development, application of drawing principles, process documentation and progression, creativity, and reflective practice, including critical thinking and self-regulation.

Table 1

Outcomes-Based Visual Journal Evaluation Rubric for BFA Students

Criteria (Weight)	5–Excellent	4–Very Good	3–Good	2–Fair	1–Poor
Technical Skill Development (25%)	Demonstrates exceptional mastery of techniques (line, value, texture, shading) across graphite, ink, and colored pencil; highly controlled and consistent execution	Strong technical performance with minor inconsistencies across media	Adequate skills; basic techniques applied but lacking refinement	Limited control; inconsistent technique use across media	Minimal skill; poor execution and weak control of materials
Application of Drawing Principles (20%)	Consistently accurate use of proportion, perspective, composition, and spatial relationships; demonstrates deep understanding	Mostly accurate with minor errors in principles	Basic understanding; noticeable but manageable errors	Partial understanding; frequent inaccuracies	Incorrect or very limited application of principles
Process Documentation and Skill Progression (20%)	Thorough and systematic documentation; clearly shows progression, refinement, and improvement across entries and media	Clear documentation with evident development, though not always consistent	Basic documentation; some evidence of progress but limited depth	Incomplete documentation; minimal evidence of improvement	Little to no documentation; no observable progression

Reflection, Critical Thinking, and Self-Regulation (15%)	Highly analytical reflection addressing objectives, evaluation of tools/materials, challenges, strengths, and clear strategies for improvement; strong evidence of self-regulation	Thoughtful reflection with some analysis of process, tools, and performance	Descriptive reflection; limited analysis or evaluation	Superficial reflection; minimal insight into challenges or improvement	No meaningful reflection; fails to address journal prompts
Creativity and Exploration (10%)	Highly original work; extensive experimentation with techniques and media beyond requirements	Shows creativity with some experimentation	Some creativity; relies on familiar approaches	Limited creativity; minimal attempt to explore techniques	No creativity or experimentation evident
Organization and Presentation (10%)	Exceptionally organized, neat, complete; all entries clearly labeled with objectives, materials, and notes	Well-organized with minor lapses in clarity or completeness	Acceptable organization; some missing labels or uneven presentation	Disorganized in parts; incomplete entries or unclear labeling	Poorly organized; incomplete and difficult to follow

Questionnaire

At the end of the semester, students completed a 4-point Likert-scale survey evaluating the perceived validity and usefulness of visual journaling. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, with a total of 15 questions.

Table 2

Likert-Scale Questionnaire on Skill Progression, Reflective Practice, and Perceived Usefulness of Visual Journaling

Section A: Skill Progression
1. Visual journaling helped me improve my technical skills in graphite and charcoal techniques (hatching, scumbling, blending).
2. Visual journaling supported my learning of pen and ink techniques (hatching, scumbling).
3. Visual journaling enhanced my ability to apply colored pencil techniques (blending, burnishing).
4. Keeping a visual journal allowed me to track my progress in drawing techniques over time.
Section B: Critical Thinking and Reflection
5. Writing reflections in my journal helped me analyze my strengths and weaknesses in each activity.
6. Visual journaling encouraged me to think critically about the effectiveness of the materials and tools I used.
7. Reflecting on challenges in my journal helped me identify strategies for improvement.
8. Visual journaling made me more aware of the objectives of each lesson and how they relate to my learning goals.
Section C: Self-Reflection and Confidence
9. Visual journaling helped me recognize which parts of the process I enjoyed or felt confident about.
10. Journaling increased my motivation to practice and improve my techniques.
11. Visual journaling made me more engaged in the learning process.
Section D: Perceived Validity and Usefulness
12. Visual journaling is a valid method for assessing my learning in a technique-driven art course.
13. Visual journaling is useful for monitoring my progress throughout the semester.
14. Visual journaling should be continued in future studio-based courses.
15. I would recommend visual journaling as a learning tool to other students in art programs.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis)

Qualitative data were derived from students' journal entries, which included both prompt responses and process notes. In keeping with reflective journaling approaches, participants wrote regular entries documenting their experiences over time, often through structured prompts, to capture contemporaneous reflections and evolving learning processes (Rudrum et al., 2022). To systematically examine these data, a thematic analysis was employed.

Initially, open coding was conducted to identify recurring patterns and significant insights within students' reflections. These initial codes were then refined and organized into broader, interpretive themes. The resulting thematic categories focused on key areas such as skill progression, challenge profiles, confidence and engagement, and the alignment between materials and techniques.

Furthermore, the analysis was guided by a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) framework, which emphasizes the interpretive role of the researcher and allows for flexible, context-sensitive theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach was particularly appropriate given the nature of the dataset, as it enabled a deeper exploration of students' subjective experiences while accommodating the complexity and variability of reflective journal entries.

In addition, visual analysis of students' artworks was undertaken to support and validate the written reflections. This included examining technical indicators such as the consistency of hatching spacing, smoothness of blending, and effectiveness of burnishing. The integration of textual and visual data enabled a more nuanced interpretation of students' learning experiences and artistic development.

Quantitative Analysis (Descriptive Statistics)

Quantitative data were obtained from the Likert-scale questionnaire administered at the end of the semester. The data were analyzed using Jamovi Version 2.6. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize students' perceptions of the validity and usefulness of visual journaling. Specifically, means and standard deviations were calculated for each scale to determine measures of central tendency and variability.

Furthermore, frequency distributions were analyzed to examine the levels of agreement across survey items, providing insight into overall response patterns. In addition, the mode was used to identify the most frequently occurring responses for each item, thereby clarifying dominant perceptions among participants.

Triangulation

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, data triangulation was employed (Morgan, 2024). Triangulation is about studying one phenomenon from multiple sources of data, using different theories, methods and researchers (Donkoh, 2023). The convergence of qualitative themes, quantitative trends, and rubric ratings provided a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the role of visual journaling in supporting skill development, higher-order thinking, and reflective practice.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study on the use of visual journaling in a Drawing Techniques course. The results are organized according to the key variables of the study, namely skill progression, critical thinking and reflective practice, self-reflection and engagement, and perceived validity and usefulness of visual journaling. Both quantitative and qualitative data are integrated in this section, including descriptive statistics from the Likert-scale survey, rubric-based assessments, and thematic analysis of students' journal entries. The combined analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how visual journaling supports technical development, higher-order thinking, and holistic learning among students in a studio-based educational context.

Skill Progression

Table 3
Students' Perceptions of Visual Journaling in Supporting Skill Progression in Drawing Techniques

	N	Mean	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Item no. 1	30	4.43	5.00	0.898	2	5
Item no. 2	30	4.43	5.00	0.774	2	5
Item no. 3	30	4.50	5.00	0.777	2	5
Item no. 4	30	4.73	5.00	0.521	3	5

As shown in Table 3, the results indicate that students generally perceived visual journaling as highly effective in supporting skill development across different drawing media. All items obtained high mean scores ranging from 4.43 to 4.73, with a consistent mode of 5.00, indicating that most respondents strongly agreed with the statements. This pattern suggests a strong positive perception of visual journaling as a tool for enhancing technical proficiency.

Specifically, Items 1 and 2 both recorded a mean of 4.43, showing that students found visual journaling beneficial in improving their skills in graphite and charcoal as well as pen-and-ink techniques, particularly in hatching, scumbling, and blending. These findings imply that documenting exercises and reflecting on techniques contributed to more effective practice reinforcement and skill acquisition. The slightly higher standard deviations (0.898 and 0.774) suggest minor variations in responses, although overall agreement remained high.

Meanwhile, Item 3, which focused on colored pencil techniques, obtained a mean of 4.50, indicating that students perceived improvement in applying blending and burnishing. This suggests that visual journaling may have supported the transfer and refinement of skills across media, as students built upon previously learned techniques.

Notably, Item 4 yielded the highest mean score of 4.73 and the lowest standard deviation (0.521), reflecting strong agreement and high consistency among respondents. This result highlights that visual journaling was particularly effective in enabling students to track their progress in drawing techniques over time. The low variability indicates a shared perception among students regarding the value of journaling in monitoring their development.

Overall, the findings presented in Table 3 support the first objective of the study, which is to assess skill progression across different media. The consistently high ratings demonstrate that visual journaling not only contributed to the development of technical skills but also enhanced students' ability to recognize and reflect on their own artistic growth, reinforcing its value as both a learning and assessment tool in studio-based art education.

Critical Thinking and Reflective Practice

Table 4
Students' Perceptions of Visual Journaling in Developing Critical Thinking and Reflective Practice

	N	Mean	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Item no. 5	30	4.73	5.00	0.521	3	5
Item no. 6	30	4.70	5.00	0.596	3	5
Item no. 7	30	4.70	5.00	0.535	3	5
Item no. 8	30	4.73	5.00	0.450	4	5

As presented in Table 4, the results indicate that students perceived visual journaling as highly effective in fostering critical thinking and reflective practice. All items obtained very high mean scores ranging from 4.70 to 4.73, with a consistent mode of 5.00, demonstrating that the majority of respondents strongly agreed with all statements. The relatively low standard deviations (0.450 to 0.596) suggest a high level of agreement and consistency in students' responses.

Specifically, Item 5 (M = 4.73, SD = 0.521) shows that students strongly agreed that writing reflections in their journals helped them analyze their strengths and weaknesses. This finding highlights the role of visual journaling in promoting self-assessment and metacognitive awareness, which are essential components of higher-order thinking.

Similarly, Item 6 (M = 4.70, SD = 0.596) indicates that visual journaling encouraged students to critically evaluate the effectiveness of materials and tools. This suggests that students moved beyond procedural execution and engaged in analytical decision-making, reflecting a deeper understanding of technique application.

Item 7 (M = 4.70, SD = 0.535) further demonstrates that reflecting on challenges enabled students to identify strategies for improvement. This finding is particularly significant as it reflects elements of self-regulation, where learners actively monitor and adjust their approaches to achieve better outcomes.

Notably, Item 8 obtained one of the highest mean scores (M = 4.73, SD = 0.450), indicating strong agreement that visual journaling enhanced students' awareness of lesson objectives and their connection to personal learning goals. The low variability suggests that this perception was consistently shared among participants. This reinforces the value of visual journaling in aligning students' learning experiences with intended outcomes, consistent with the principles of outcomes-based education.

Overall, the findings in Table 4 support the second objective of the study, which is to determine how journaling fosters higher-order thinking skills. The consistently high ratings across all items indicate that visual journaling effectively promotes critical analysis, evaluation, reflective thinking, and self-regulation, thereby enhancing both cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of learning in studio-based art education.

Self-Reflection and Confidence

Table 5
Students' Perceptions of Visual Journaling in Enhancing Self-Reflection and Learning Confidence

	N	Mean	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Item no. 9	30	4.83	5.00	0.379	4	5
Item no. 10	30	4.77	5.00	0.430	4	5
Item no. 11	30	4.63	5.00	0.556	3	5

As shown in Table 5, the results indicate that students perceived visual journaling as highly effective in promoting self-reflection, confidence, and engagement in the learning process. All items yielded very high mean scores ranging from 4.63 to 4.83, with a consistent mode of 5.00, indicating that the majority of respondents strongly agreed with the statements. The relatively low standard deviations (0.379 to 0.556) further suggest a high level of agreement and consistency among participants.

In particular, Item 9 obtained the highest mean score (M = 4.83, SD = 0.379), indicating that students strongly agreed that visual journaling helped them recognize which parts of the process they enjoyed or felt confident about. This finding highlights the role of visual journaling in fostering self-awareness, enabling students to identify their strengths and preferences within the creative process.

Similarly, Item 10 (M = 4.77, SD = 0.430) shows that journaling significantly contributed to increased motivation to practice and improve techniques. This suggests that reflective documentation may enhance intrinsic motivation, encouraging students to engage more actively with their artistic development.

Meanwhile, Item 11 (M = 4.63, SD = 0.556) indicates that students found visual journaling effective in increasing their engagement in the learning process. Although slightly lower than the other items, the mean score still reflects a strong positive perception. The slightly higher variability suggests that while most students felt more engaged, individual experiences may have varied.

Overall, the findings presented in Table 5 demonstrate that visual journaling plays a significant role in supporting self-reflection, motivation, and confidence among students. These results further reinforce the holistic impact of visual journaling, not only in developing technical and cognitive skills but also in enhancing affective dimensions of learning, such as engagement and self-efficacy, which are essential in studio-based art education.

Perceived Validity and Usefulness of Visual Journaling

Table 6
Students' Perceptions of the Validity and Usefulness of Visual Journaling

	N	Mean	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Item no. 12	30	4.73	5.00	0.640	2	5
Item no. 13	30	4.60	5.00	0.814	1	5
Item no. 14	30	4.63	5.00	0.809	1	5
Item no. 15	30	4.73	5.00	0.640	2	5

As presented in Table 6, the results indicate that students generally perceived visual journaling as a highly valid and useful tool in a technique-driven art course. All items yielded high mean scores ranging from 4.60 to 4.73, with a consistent mode of 5.00, suggesting that the majority of respondents strongly agreed with all statements. However, compared to previous sections, the slightly higher standard deviations (0.640 to 0.814) indicate greater variability in responses, reflecting some differences in students' perceptions.

Specifically, Item 12 (M = 4.73, SD = 0.640) shows that students strongly agreed that visual journaling is a valid method for assessing learning in a studio-based, technique-oriented course. This finding supports the use of visual journals as an alternative assessment tool that captures both process and output, aligning with outcomes-based approaches to learning.

Similarly, Item 13 (M = 4.60, SD = 0.814) indicates that students generally perceived visual journaling as useful for monitoring progress throughout the semester. While the mean remains high, the relatively larger standard deviation and lower minimum value (1) suggest that a few students had less favorable experiences. This variation may reflect differences in individual learning preferences or levels of engagement with the journaling process.

Item 14 (M = 4.63, SD = 0.809) demonstrates that students agreed that visual journaling should be continued in future studio-based courses, indicating support for its integration into the curriculum. The variability in responses suggests that while most students recognized its value, some may have perceived journaling as demanding or time-intensive.

Notably, Item 15 (M = 4.73, SD = 0.640) reveals strong agreement that students would recommend visual journaling to other art students, further reinforcing its perceived usefulness as both a learning and reflective tool. This endorsement suggests that students not only recognized its benefits personally but also saw its broader applicability in art education.

Overall, the findings in Table 6 indicate that visual journaling is widely perceived as a valid, useful, and transferable pedagogical strategy in studio-based learning. These results support its continued implementation in art education, while also highlighting the importance of considering individual differences in student engagement to maximize its effectiveness.

Personal Growth and Self-Reflection as Emerging Themes

Thematic analysis of students' responses to the prompt "Reflect on your personal growth as an artist this week. What did you learn about yourself?" revealed several recurring themes that

highlight the role of visual journaling in fostering self-awareness and artistic development. Using reflexive thematic analysis, initial codes were generated and subsequently organized into broader themes. Table 7 presents the summary of themes and representative codes.

Table 7
Themes and Codes Derived From Students' Reflections

Theme	Codes	Sample Description
Development of Self-Awareness	Recognizing strengths, identifying weaknesses, awareness of style	Students became more aware of their abilities and limitations
Skill Progression Awareness	Improved technique, better control, refinement over time	Students noticed technical improvement
Increased Confidence	Feeling more confident, reduced hesitation	Students expressed growing confidence in their work
Critical Reflection	Evaluating mistakes, comparing outputs	Students analyzed their performance
Self-Regulation Strategies	Planning improvements, adjusting techniques	Students described strategies for improvement
Emotional Engagement	Enjoyment, frustration, personal connection	Students reflected on emotional aspects of learning

The analysis revealed that students developed a strong sense of self-awareness through visual journaling. Many participants reflected on their strengths and weaknesses, indicating a deeper understanding of their artistic abilities. For instance, several entries described realizations about difficulties with specific techniques, such as shading or line control, while also identifying areas of improvement. This suggests that journaling facilitated metacognitive awareness, allowing students to critically assess their own learning.

Another prominent theme was awareness of skill progression, where students recognized improvements in their technical abilities over time. Reflections frequently highlighted increased control in executing techniques such as blending and hatching, demonstrating that journaling enabled students to monitor their development. This aligns with the study's objective of assessing skill progression, as students were not only developing skills but also becoming conscious of their improvement.

In addition, students expressed increased confidence in their artistic abilities. Many responses indicated reduced hesitation and greater comfort in handling materials, suggesting that repeated practice combined with reflection reinforced self-efficacy. This finding supports the idea that reflective practices contribute to confidence-building in studio-based learning environments.
The theme of critical reflection also emerged strongly, as students evaluated their performance and identified areas for improvement. Entries often included comparisons between previous and current outputs, as well as reflections on what worked and what did not. This demonstrates the development of higher-order thinking skills, particularly analysis and evaluation.

Relatedly, students exhibited elements of self-regulation, as they articulated strategies for improving their work. These included adjusting techniques, practicing specific skills, and planning future actions. This indicates that visual journaling supported not only reflection but also goal-directed learning behaviors.

Finally, emotional engagement was evident in students' reflections, with many expressing enjoyment, frustration, and personal connection to their artistic process. These emotional responses highlight the holistic nature of learning in art education, where cognitive and affective dimensions are closely intertwined.

To enhance the credibility and validity of the results, data triangulation was employed by integrating findings from the rubric-based assessments, Likert-scale survey responses, and thematic analysis of students' journal entries. The convergence of these three data sources provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of visual journaling in supporting students' learning.

Across all data sources, there was strong evidence supporting skill progression in drawing techniques. The rubric assessments demonstrated improvements in students' technical proficiency, particularly in line control, value rendering, and application of media-specific techniques such as hatching, blending, and burnishing. These findings were reinforced by survey results (Table 3), where students reported high levels of agreement that visual journaling enhanced their skills across graphite, pen and ink, and colored pencil. Similarly, thematic analysis revealed the emergence of the theme "awareness of skill progression," with students explicitly recognizing improvements in their work over time. The alignment of performance-based evidence, self-reported perceptions, and reflective narratives confirms that visual journaling effectively supported technical development.

Triangulation of Findings

In relation to critical thinking and reflective practice, a high level of convergence was also observed. Rubric criteria on reflection, critical thinking, and self-regulation indicated that students were able to analyze their work, identify challenges, and articulate strategies for improvement. This was strongly supported by survey findings (Table 4), where students reported that journaling helped them evaluate materials, analyze strengths and weaknesses, and connect learning objectives to their work. Thematic analysis further substantiated these results through the themes of "critical reflection" and "self-regulation strategies," where students demonstrated the ability to evaluate their performance and plan subsequent actions. Together, these findings indicate that visual journaling fosters higher-order thinking processes, consistent with the study's second objective.

The triangulated data also highlight the role of visual journaling in promoting self-reflection, confidence, and engagement. Rubric results showed consistent documentation of reflective insights and increasing independence in the creative process. Survey responses (Table 5) indicated that students developed greater confidence, motivation, and engagement, with particularly high agreement on recognizing strengths and areas of confidence. These perceptions were further supported by qualitative themes such as "increased confidence" and "emotional engagement," where students expressed greater comfort and personal connection to their artistic practice. This convergence suggests that visual journaling contributes not only to cognitive and technical development but also to the affective dimensions of learning.

Finally, the perceived validity and usefulness of visual journaling were consistently affirmed across data sources. The rubric demonstrated that journals effectively captured both process and outcomes, aligning with outcomes-based assessment practices. Survey findings (Table 6) showed strong agreement that visual journaling is a valid method for assessing learning, useful for monitoring progress, and worthy of continued implementation. These perceptions were further reflected in qualitative responses, where students expressed appreciation for the structure and purpose of journaling in guiding their learning. Although minor variations were observed in survey responses, the overall pattern supports the acceptability and relevance of visual journaling as a pedagogical and assessment tool.

Overall, the triangulation of rubric assessments, survey data, and thematic analysis findings provides robust evidence that visual journaling is an effective strategy for supporting skill progression, higher-order thinking, and holistic student development. The consistency across multiple data sources strengthens the reliability of the findings and underscores the value of integrating reflective practice into studio-based art education.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of visual journaling as both a pedagogical and assessment tool in a Drawing Techniques course within the BFA Visual Communication program. Drawing upon rubric-based assessments, survey results, and thematic analysis of student journals, the findings provide strong evidence of the multifaceted benefits of integrating visual journaling into studio-based art education.

First, the study successfully assessed skill progression across graphite/charcoal, pen and ink, and colored pencil techniques, revealing consistent improvement in students' technical competencies. Rubric-based evaluations and student perceptions indicated that journaling facilitated the development of essential drawing skills, including line control, value rendering, texture, and media handling. More importantly, students demonstrated an increased ability to recognize and monitor their own progress over time, confirming that visual journals serve as effective tools for documenting and supporting technical growth.

Second, the findings demonstrated that visual journaling significantly fosters higher-order thinking skills, including critical analysis, evaluation, planning, and reflective practice. Students were able to analyze their strengths and weaknesses, evaluate the effectiveness of tools and materials, and identify strategies for improvement—indicating strong engagement in metacognitive and self-regulatory processes. These outcomes align with the principles of outcomes-based education, which emphasize learner-centered approaches and the development of independent, reflective learners.

Third, the evaluation of student perceptions revealed that visual journaling is widely regarded as a valid and useful alternative to traditional summative assessments. The survey results showed high levels of agreement regarding its effectiveness in monitoring progress, supporting learning, and enhancing engagement. Students also expressed willingness to recommend visual journaling and support its continued use in future studio courses. While minor variations in responses suggest differences in individual preferences, the overall findings affirm the acceptability and relevance of journaling as an assessment strategy that captures both process and product.

Finally, the thematic analysis of journal entries identified recurring patterns that reflect learning trajectories, challenges, and the integration of theory and practice. Key themes included self-awareness, skill progression, confidence development, critical reflection, and self-regulation. These themes provide rich qualitative evidence that visual journaling supports not only technical skill development but also deeper cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. The alignment between these themes, rubric results, and survey findings further strengthens the credibility of the study through triangulation.

In conclusion, visual journaling emerges as a holistic and effective approach to learning and assessment in studio-based art education. It enables students to document their artistic processes, reflect critically on their experiences, and develop both technical and higher-order

thinking skills. By aligning with outcomes-based education frameworks, visual journaling supports continuous learning, self-directed growth, and meaningful engagement. The findings of this study underscore its potential as a sustainable and valuable practice in fine arts education, particularly in fostering reflective, skilled, and self-regulated learners.

Acknowledgements

The researcher gratefully acknowledges the support provided by Lyceum of the Philippines University–Cavite (LPU Cavite) for the research grant that made this study possible. The financial assistance significantly contributed to the successful completion of this research, including the implementation of the study, data collection, and analysis.

The researcher also extends sincere appreciation to the students who participated in the study for their time, cooperation, and valuable insights. Their active engagement and honest reflections were essential to the outcomes of this research.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The researcher declares that generative AI and AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, Grammarly and Microsoft Copilot were utilized to assist in correcting grammatical and spelling errors, as well as in rephrasing statements to improve clarity and accuracy. The use of these tools was limited to language refinement and did not involve the generation of original research content, data analysis, or interpretation of results.

In addition, Jamovi (Version 2.6) was used solely for the statistical analysis of quantitative data.

All outputs generated were reviewed, interpreted, and validated by the researcher. The researcher takes full responsibility for the content of this manuscript, ensuring its accuracy, originality, and adherence to ethical research standards.

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Generative AI in STEM Projects to Develop Analytical Thinking and Problem-Solving

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This research investigated the integration of Generative AI (GenAI) in STEM project-based learning for 22 9th-grade students. The study aimed to develop usage guidelines, measure effects on analytical thinking and problem-solving, and create an instructional model. Findings revealed that all students (100%) used GenAI for project development, reporting high satisfaction (4.67 average) due to its ease of use. GenAI assisted in all project stages—from problem analysis to presentation—by aiding information retrieval, design, coding, and complex problem-solving. A key limitation identified by students was the need to verify GenAI's information for accuracy. The study confirmed GenAI's positive impact: students' post-instruction analytical thinking and problem-solving skills were significantly higher than pre-instruction (at the .05 statistical level). Furthermore, a five-stage instructional model (problem identification, planning, execution, artifact creation, presentation) using GenAI as a supporting tool was developed. Experts evaluated this model, which targets analytical skills and teamwork, as highly appropriate (4.36 average).

Keywords: STEM, generative AI, analytical thinking and problem-solving skills

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Introduction

In the landscape of 21st-century education, cultivating higher-order cognitive competencies—such as analytical thinking, complex problem-solving, collaborative teamwork, and digital literacy—has become the cornerstone of modern educational reform (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019). This shift is particularly crucial within Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines, which drive national innovation, socio-economic development, and readiness for a digitized global economy. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is widely recognized as one of the most effective pedagogical strategies for STEM instruction (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). By centering learning on authentic, real-world problems, PBL encourages students to actively synthesize theoretical concepts across diverse subject matters, design tangible prototypes, and evaluate practical outcomes (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Despite its theoretical benefits, the classroom execution of STEM-focused PBL presents significant instructional hurdles (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Secondary students, particularly 9th-graders, frequently struggle with cognitive overload when navigating multi-disciplinary requirements. For instance, developing a smart agricultural device requires a simultaneous understanding of biological parameters (Science), microcontrollers and wiring (Technology), structural prototyping (Engineering), and raw data calculations (Mathematics). Without immediate, highly personalized scaffolding, students often experience frustration during complex data analysis, syntax debugging in coding, or structural design iterations. These obstacles can stall project progression and diminish student motivation.

Concurrently, the rapid emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools—such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and AI-driven graphic engines—offers a transformative approach to scaffolding student learning. GenAI[1] functions not merely as a passive search engine, but as an active, dialogic cognitive assistant capable of generating customized computer code, analyzing unstructured qualitative data, modeling engineering designs, and suggesting immediate troubleshooting methods. Integrating GenAI as a supporting tool within STEM projects could mitigate students' operational bottlenecks, allowing them to allocate more cognitive resources toward critical analysis and creative problem-solving.

However, the educational adoption of GenAI remains largely unstructured, raising concerns regarding plagiarism, critical thinking suppression, and an over-reliance on automated answers. In the context of Thailand’s educational system, integrating AI into secondary-level STEM workflows is a novel frontier requiring empirical investigation and rigorous pedagogical guidelines. This research seeks to address this gap by establishing an evidence-based framework.

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To study and establish operational guidelines for utilizing Generative AI within the secondary STEM project-based learning process.
2. To investigate the empirical effects of GenAI integration on the development of students' analytical thinking and problem-solving skills.
3. To design, evaluate, and validate a comprehensive instructional management model that seamlessly blends GenAI workflows with STEM project execution.

Literature Review

Generative AI in Modern Educational Settings

Generative AI refers to advanced machine learning models (primarily Large Language Models or LLMs) trained on massive datasets to generate novel text, computer code, images, and other media based on user-inputted natural language queries (prompts) (Brown et al., 2020). In educational research, GenAI is recognized for its ability to act as a customized, on-demand tutor that adapts to an individual student's pacing and learning style (OpenAI, 2023). According to Majumdar and Gupta (2024), GenAI can provide localized explanations of abstract scientific concepts, translate technical documentation, and write functional starter scripts for microcontrollers. However, the pedagogical challenge lies in maintaining a balance between automated scaffolding and active student critical inquiry (Lee et al., 2025).

Project-Based Learning (PBL) and STEM Integration

PBL is an instructional method that engages students in deep, continuous investigation of complex, meaningful questions (Guido, 2024). In STEM education, PBL serves as a unifying framework where science provides the theoretical understanding, mathematics provides the analytical precision, engineering offers the structural problem-solving methodology, and technology acts as the enabling tool (Klomim, 2016). Traditional models of PBL follow highly structured sequences, such as 7-stage or 9-stage workflows. However, when integrating digital technologies like AI, these stages must be re-evaluated to prevent technological tools from overshadowing the learning objectives (Xiao & Li, 2023).

Cognitive Tools and Critical Thinking

A “cognitive tool” is a technological device or environment that helps learners perform cognitive operations that would otherwise be difficult or impossible (Jonassen, 2000). According to cognitive load theory, by offloading routine mechanical tasks (such as searching through manual libraries or fixing basic coding syntax errors), students can focus their working memory on higher-level analytical tasks (Zhao et al., 2025). Recent research indicates that GenAI can act as a highly effective cognitive tool. For example, in computer science and STEM education, AI-assisted feedback loops help students self-correct coding errors in real-time, boosting their self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2024).

However, studies also caution against “unverified trust” in AI outputs. In studies involving knowledge workers and students, Lee et al. (2025) and Katarzyna Szmyd & Ewelina Mitera (2024) observed that over-reliance on AI can lead to a decline in independent critical thinking. Therefore, pedagogical frameworks must explicitly include steps for data verification, prompting, and critical evaluation (Girish, 2025; Ruiz Viruel et al., 2025).

Methodology

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach conducted over one academic semester (18 weeks). The target group consisted of 22 9th-grade students enrolled in an elective STEM education course at Naresuan University Secondary Demonstration School during the 2024 academic year. The research instruments included:

1. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire on GenAI usage and satisfaction.

2. Semi-structured interviews regarding students' experiences and perspectives on GenAI tools (e.g., ChatGPT for coding and text generation, Canva AI for presentation design).
3. Pre- and post-instruction performance assessments and self-evaluation rubrics measuring analytical thinking and problem-solving skills. Data analysis involved mean scores, standard deviations, qualitative thematic analysis, and paired-samples t-tests to compare pre- and post-learning skills.

Results

Guidelines for Using GenAI in STEM PBL

All students (100%) utilized GenAI primarily for project development and content creation. Students reported the highest level of satisfaction (mean = 4.67) due to its ease and convenience of use. GenAI played a significant role in every stage of the project—from problem analysis and planning to design and presentation—by aiding in information retrieval, code generation, and complex problem-solving. A key limitation identified was that some AI-generated information was inaccurate, requiring students to verify facts before application.

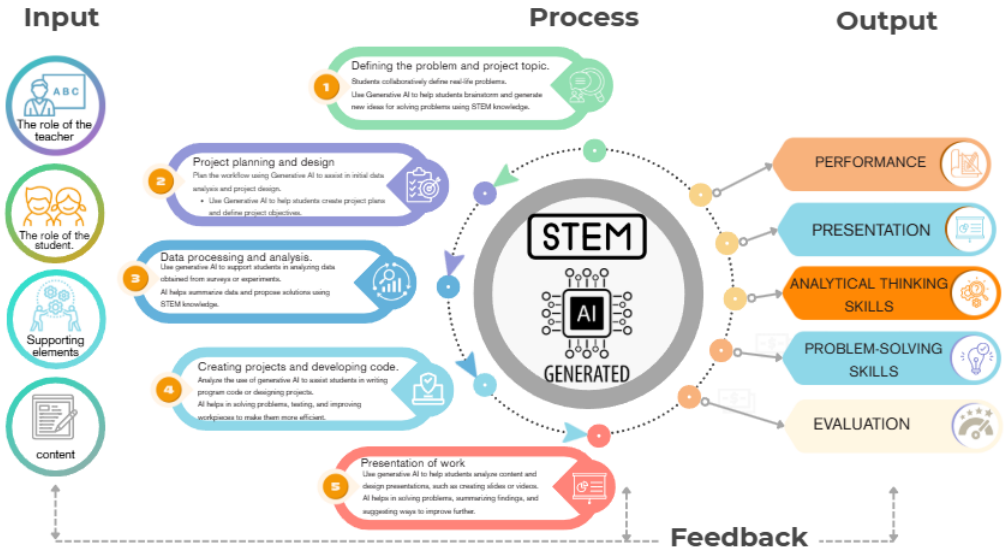
Effects on Skill Development

GenAI positively impacted students' skills by broadening their perspectives and simplifying the understanding of complex concepts. Statistical analysis revealed that students' analytical thinking and problem-solving skills were significantly higher post-instruction compared to pre-instruction at the .05 level.

Instructional Management Model

A 5-stage instructional model was developed to integrate Generative AI into STEM project-based learning. This model consists of problem identification, planning, execution/data analysis, artifact creation/code development, and presentation, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The 5-Stage STEM-AI Instructional Management Model



Experts evaluated this STEM-AI integrated model as highly appropriate (mean = 4.36).

Discussion

The findings align with the premise that Generative AI acts as a catalyst for deeper learning in PBL environments. By assisting with coding, design, and complex problem-solving, GenAI helps students focus on higher-order analytical thinking. However, because AI occasionally generated inaccurate information, students were required to engage in critical evaluation. This limitation transformed the nature of their critical thinking from mere knowledge acquisition to active data verification and integration, ultimately developing a more profound cognitive process.

Conclusion

Implications

For educators, the developed 5-stage model provides a clear, structured roadmap for integrating AI into classrooms. Rather than banning or ignoring AI, teachers should design learning environments where AI serves as a scaffold, while keeping human critical analysis at the center of the learning process. For curriculum developers, STEM curricula should explicitly incorporate AI literacy, prompt engineering, and fact-checking protocols alongside traditional technical subjects.

Limitations

The primary limitation identified is the risk of over-reliance. If students lack foundational science or coding knowledge, they may accept incorrect AI outputs blindly, leading to non-functional prototypes. Furthermore, this study was limited to a purposive sample of 22 students in one school, suggesting that broader, larger-scale research is needed to verify generalizability.

Recommendations

Future research should pursue longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of AI tools on students' independent cognitive development. Comparative studies are recommended to evaluate differing pedagogical outcomes across diverse AI interfaces. Finally, structured teacher training frameworks must be developed to equip educators with the skills needed to effectively facilitate AI-integrated STEM classrooms.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Naresuan University Secondary Demonstration School for providing the context and support for this research. Special thanks to the experts who evaluated the instructional model and to the 9th-grade students who actively participated in the study.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author used Google Gemini to translate, summarize, and format the manuscript from the original Thai research report into English. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Gaza Verse to Rehumanize the Dehumanized: Poetics of Palestinian Resistance in the *Gaza Verse*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper explores the poetic representations of Palestinian resistance against the recent genocide in the state of Palestine. *Gaza Verse* which is the primary source of this study is a 2025 publication of the Gaza Poets Society founded by the poet and journalist Mohammed Moussa in 2018. The present study focuses on the voices of Palestinian poets and poets of different nationalities from all around the globe who contribute to an ongoing cause for the freedom of Palestinians by rehumanizing the dehumanized Palestinian bodies and narratives through poetry. While acknowledging the impossibility of fully grasping, decoding or understanding the lived realities and the unconscious of the Palestinian struggle, the study highlights the crucial necessity of initiating a global discussion on their lived experiences as it eventually poses a challenge to the dominant discourses and misrepresented narratives on Palestinian identity, belonging and resistance. While incorporating Achille Mbembe's theories on sovereignty, necropower and necropolitics, where sovereign entities practice power over the life and death of certain groups of people as the theoretical framework, this study explores the "superhumanization" of the Israeli entity led by Benjamin Netanyahu verses the infra-humanization and dehumanization of Palestinians as represented in the *Gaza Verse*.

Keywords: Palestine, genocide, poetry, necropolitics, sovereignty

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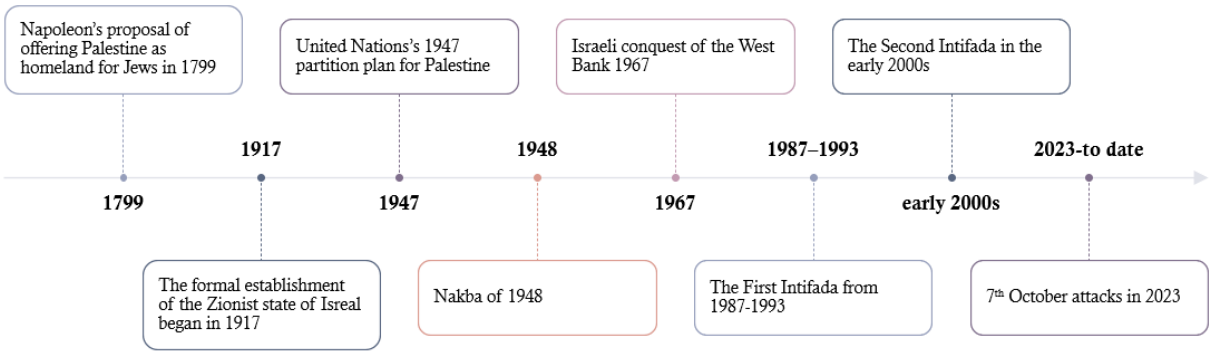
Introduction

> Can the *other*, in light of all that is happening, still be regarded as my fellow creature? When the extremes are broached, as is the case for us here and now, precisely what does my and the *other's* humanity consist in? The other's burden having become too overwhelming, would it not be better for my life to stop being linked to its presence, as much as its to mine? Why must I, despite all opposition, nonetheless look after the *other*, stand as close as possible to his life if, in return, his only aim is my ruin? If, ultimately, humanity exists only through being in and of the world, can we find a relation with *others* based on the reciprocal recognition of our common vulnerability and finitude? (Mbembe, 2019, p. 3)

The relevance of the above quote from Achille Mbembe's seminal text *Necropolitics* to the present study lies in the fact that humanity consists of, though it is often overlooked, the reciprocal recognition of humanity's common vulnerabilities and finitude, while not taking advantage of the vulnerabilities of the "other" while hiding "mine". This study derives from the idea that the genocide[1] currently happening in Palestine, in addition to many other wars and armed conflicts happening all around the world, including Congo, Sudan and Lybia must draw the humanity's attention to the conditions in which it is happening and the conditions which have historically sanctioned such genocidal attempts starting from the Nazi Germany to the modern day Palestine and Congo.

In terms of the historical backdrop of this geopolitical controversy regarding Palestine and Isreal, according to Chomsky and Pappé (2015, as cited in Adell, 2024) the genocide in Palestine originated as a result of a colonial project. Figure 1 below provides a sketch of the history of Israeli-Palestine problem which will be further elaborated in the next paragraphs.

Figure 1
History of the Israeli-Palestine Problem



Establishment of a Jewish state was not merely for modern political development, but it was also a colonial project of which the roots stretch back to Napoleon's proposal of offering Palestine as homeland for Jews in 1799. The first wave of Jewish settlers reached Palestine in 1800s and their attempt to expand the land they were given were constantly challenged by the

[1] The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory reported on 16th September 2025 that Israel has committed "genocide" against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The report states that Israel committed four of the five genocidal acts defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, namely killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of the Palestinians in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent births (OHCHR, 2025).

native Palestinian population. The formal establishment of the Zionist state of Isreal began in 1917 with the British Mandate for Palestine when the British foreign secretary Arthur J. Belfour produced a written declaration expressing support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (United Nations, 2025). During the Mandate, from 1922 to 1947, there was a large-scale Jewish immigration, mainly from Eastern Europe, the numbers gradually increasing during the 1930s with the Nazi regime in Germany and the holocaust.[2]

Consequently, in 1947 the Palestine problem was passed on to the United Nations leading to the adoption of Resolution 181 (ii) of 1947, outlining the partition plan for Palestine in order to create a separate Jewish state for the Jews and an Arab state for the natives. This is marked as the driving factor behind the 1948 conflict between Jews and Palestinians popularly known as the *Nakba* of 1948 or the "original sin" as referred to by anti-Zionists.[3] During the *Nakba*, many Palestinians were forcefully driven out of their native lands, and the Institute for Palestinian Studies state that 70% of the Gaza's inhabitants are Palestinian refugees driven out of their homes and lands during the genocidal assaults waged by Israel since 1948 (2024, cited in Adell, 2024). The year 1967 marked another crucial milestone with the Israeli conquest of the West Bank and the establishment of Israeli miliary control in the occupied Palestinian lands. The first Palestinian uprising called the *First Intifada* occurred from 1987–1993 with Palestinians rising against Israeli occupation due to various reasons such as illegal land confiscation, home demolition, arbitrary arrests, restrictions of movement and trade, employment and limited access to resources. It is during this period that a Palestinian Islamist militant group called Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas) was organized with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in the land of Palestine (Abu-Amr, 1993, Pappé, 2017, as cited in Adell, 2024). The period of 1990s marked peace negotiations such as the *Oslo Accords* between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, even though these attempts failed to bring lasting peace.

The second Palestinian uprising called the *Second Intifada* erupted in the early 2000s increasing the tensions and casualties in the Gaza strip. Following the re-election of Benjamin Netanyahu as the Prime Minister of Israel in 2015, Israeli- Palestinian conflict was further lengthened. Most recently, the 7th of October attacks in 2023 led by Hamas killed more than 1,200 people and at least 252 people were abducted to Gaza as hostages according to Israeli sources (Human Rights Council, 2024). Israel answered this incident with extreme violence as Israel's reaction was not only directed towards Hamas but the native Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip as well. The West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip are currently under illegal occupation by Israel and humanitarian aid is blocked by the Israeli government and many Palestinians have been abused, incarcerated without trial in Israeli prisons. Despite the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestine, United Nations humanitarian aid missions and many other non-government organizational missions have been and continue to be disrupted by Israel. On the 22nd of August 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Famine Review Committee confirmed that Famine (IPC Phase 5) was occurring in Gaza. On the 16th of September 2025, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory stated that "Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip" (United Nations, 2025).

[2] Holocaust, the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II.
[3]Anti-Zionism is the opposition to the political ideology of Zionism, which supports the establishment and maintenance of a Jewish state in Israel, and it is distinct from anti-Semitism.

Therefore, the present study attempts to explore how in this backdrop, a poetic representation of Palestinian struggle, The *Gaza Verse* (2025) attempts to rehumanize the dehumanized Palestinian bodies and narratives through poetry and how it functions as a powerful form of resistance.

Research Objective

- To explore how *Gaza Verse* rehumanizes the dehumanized Palestinian bodies and narratives through poetry

Research Questions

- How does *Gaza Verse* explore the infra-humanization [4] and dehumanization [5] of Palestinian bodies and narratives poetically?
- How does *Gaza Verse* reflect the Palestinian struggle as a form of resistance against sovereignty and necropolitics?

Literature Review

This section reviews and synthesizes existing research related to the scope of the present study based on the key themes: Palestinian poetry, memory, identity and resistance. It identifies a considerable gap in literature based on the interconnection between Palestinian resistance and contemporary poetry written on the Palestinian struggle.

While there are existing studies on the language of resistance in the poems written during the latter half of the twentieth century by the poets: Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish, and Tawfiq Zayyad (Boayrid, 2019) and studies on the Palestinian poetry of 1970s (Ashrawi, 1978), there is a considerable lack of research conducted on the contemporary poetry on the Palestinian struggle.

Recent studies such as *Between Exile and Elegy: Resistance, Memory, and Identity in Palestinian Literary Voices* (Shabana, 2025) and *Genocide and Resistance: An Analysis of Palestinian Poetry* (Adell, 2024) based on both twentieth century poetry and modern poetry on the Palestinian struggle reflect how poetry functions as a form of resistance against the occupation. Abdullah and Hassan (2025) in their paper *Emerging voices of resistance: A postcolonial perspective on noncanonical selected Palestinian poems after the 7th October 2023 attacks* explore the noncanonical writings on resistance by contemporary Palestinian poets. Therefore, based on the literature review, the present study identifies a gap in literature based on studies conducted from 2023 to date on the current genocide and contemporary poetry written not only by poets of Palestinian origin but writers, activists and humanitarians from across the world, reflecting the poetics of resistance while contributing to the ongoing struggle for the freedom of Palestinians.

[4] Infrahumanization is the belief that one's own group is more human than other groups, which are perceived as less human.
[5] Dehumanization means treating individuals or groups as non-humans, denying them dignity, moral consideration, and essential human qualities.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This is a qualitative study conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis, as *Gaza Verse*, the primary source of the present study has been explored and analysed using Achille Mbembe's socio-political theory on necropolitics, closely related to concepts such as sovereignty, necropower and biopower.

Necropolitics is "the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 66) It derives from the Greek word "nekros" meaning "corpse" (Altawaiji et al., 2025). Sovereignty, as defined by Mbembe is "to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (2019, p. 66).

While criticising an imperialistic approach to sovereignty, Mbembe asserts that his concern is about those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations. For instance, the genocide happening in Palestine. Therefore, to kill or to let live constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes. Mbembe's theory of necropolitics derives from Michel Foucault's theorization of "biopower" which means the domain of life over which power has asserted its control. Mbembe (2019) asks two questions about biopower while laying the foundation for his theory on necropolitics.

1. What does the implementation of such a right (to determine who must live and who must die) tell us about the one who is thus put to death and about the relation of enmity that sets such a person against his murderer?
2. Can the notion of biopower account for the contemporary ways in which the political takes as its primary and absolute objective, the enemy's murder, doing so under the guise of war, resistance, or the war on terror?

He demonstrates that the notion of biopower is insufficient to account for contemporary forms of violence, putting forward a theory of necropolitics, to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating "death-worlds", that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the "living dead".

The present study therefore incorporates the theory on necropolitics to conduct a close reading of three selected poems from the *Gaza Verse*, and notes that the contemporary forms of necropower blurs the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom as reflected in the *Gaza Verse.* The three poems were selected out of the eighty-two poems and artwork published in the 2025 issue of *Gaza Verse*, based on a thematical categorization in relation to the focus of the present study on dehumanization and infrahumanization of Palestinian bodies, lives and narratives.

Discussion

The first poem that appears in the *Gaza Verse* (2025) titled "For Anas al-Sharif" written by Tanisa Gunesekera can be explored and analysed in relation to the dehumanization of Palestinians as a political strategy of elimination. Anas al Sharif was a Palestinian journalist known for his courageous reporting from Gaza, where he became a prominent voice for the Palestinians. He was killed tragically on August 10, 2025, in an Israeli airstrike that targeted a tent where he and other journalists were reporting outside the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.

His death sparked outrage on social media platforms condemning that the attack is a blatant assault on press freedom. Prior to his death, he faced accusations from the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) of being affiliated with Hamas, which were widely rejected by human rights advocates (Al Jazeera, 2025; Arham Online, 2025). Selected verses of the poem are quoted below.

> All I keep thinking is those doing this stiff in
> suits have never known and will never know
> the joy of lifting (or watching a loved one lift)
> a most beloved baby high above your smile
> bouncing in the air safe in loving hands
> protected
>
> Joy like your belly filling with ripples
> when your hands are tickled by the
> giggles that vibrate their ribs
>
> The sweetness of a toddler's kiss
> that sends stardust zooming round your cheek.
>
> Anas Jamal Al-Sharif knew joy.
> He loved and he is loved. His joy, his tears, his smile, his heartbreak,
> his strength, his tenderness, his love will be remembered.
>
> They cannot understand joy.
> Joy like jumping off a truck into a brother's
> Arms, hugs heavy enough to lighten feet, laughs
> carrying tears, kisses on cheeks, hands that
> hold each other's heads high, the shared
> weight of a press vest under siege.
>
> Anas Al Sharif knew joy.
> They – loveless, stiff, unmoveable in suits – have money and tactics
> and papers and drones; nothing but emptiness cloned.
>
> (Gunasekera, 2025, lines 1–14 and 24–32)

As opposed to the Palestinians often dehumanized by Israel, the poem implies that the non-humans are in reality "they, who cannot understand joy". By placing the humane existence of Anas al sharif, "who knew joy" versus Israelis who only "have money, tactics and drones", the poet hints at the driving force behind necropolitics; the sovereign right to kill the "other" through dehumanization, as Israel did in killing Anas al Sharif through false accusations of labeling him a terrorist affiliated with Hamas. Mbembe (2019) states that this sovereign right to kill can be seen as a common element of state power in modernity. The Nazi state was the most complete example of a state exercising the right to kill, and Israel continues the same inhumane legacy. To Israel, Anas al-sharif was the "other" who spoke against the empire and therefore had to be tactically labeled a terrorist and eliminated. Mbembe (ibid.) writes on this account that "the perception of the existence of the 'other' as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my life potential and

security" is one of the many imaginary dimensions characteristic of sovereignty in both early and late modernity (p. 72).

Moreover, the means through which the powerful entities eliminate the "other" is often mechanized, in this case, through an airstrike, but historically through guillotines and gas chambers as well. Mbembe (2019) demonstrates how in France, the advent of the guillotine marked a new phase in the "democratization" of the means of disposing of the enemies of state and how the gas chambers and ovens were the culmination of a long process of dehumanizing and industrializing death of the Jewish population in the Nazy Germany. Mechanization of death therefore not only impersonalizes the ways of killing but also aims at disposing of a large number of victims in a relatively short span of time. For instance, the Israeli air-strikes have been mechanizing killing on mass scale from the beginning of the genocide to date. Therefore, in this light, sovereignty can be defined as the occupation of both land and life, and occupation means relegating the "other" to a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood; the place in which she or he can be killed under the guise of war.

Another poem published in the *Gaza Verse* titled "Lullaby" written by Marwah El-Murad can be explored in relation to the dehumanization and infrahumanization of Palestinian children. The poem reads as;

> When I was seven I broke my toe
> My mother held me and told me to think of the
> Palestinian children whose pain and suffering
> I'll never know
>
> Now I'm 32 and I put my daughter to bed
> and I think of the Palestinian mothers
> whose pain and suffering I'll never know.
> I kiss her toes
>
> my baby is wrapped in white
> like theirs
> but tomorrow
> she will wake.
>
> (Murad, 2025)

The poem reflects how two groups of children, namely the Palestinian children and the non-Palestinian children who are geographically apart in the same world, live in two contrasting realities merely based on the socially constructed nationalities assigned to them at birth. Furthermore, the flashback of the poet of breaking a toe at the age of seven and her current age of thirty-two gestures at the prolonged conflict between Palestine and Israel, affecting many lives, including generations of infants and children. Moreover, this poem draws attention to a post on X (former Twitter) posted and later deleted by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, referring to Palestinian children in Gaza as "children of darkness" in the wake of the Hamas assault on 7th October 2023, in contrast to Israeli children whom he refers to as "children of light" (Figure 2). It is often visible on social media how Israel uses this de-humanization rhetoric to justify massive military operations in Gaza by portraying Israel as a morally superior victim under assault.

Figure 2

A Post Posted and Later Deleted by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on X



Note. From The New Arab Staff, 2023

The central role that poetry as a form of art plays in resistance against the subtle manipulation of language in mainstream media is evident here as Murad (2025) reiterates that Palestinian children, though exposed to extreme violence since birth, have the same human rights as any other child for they safety, education and the right to live. Murad (ibid.) therefore writes against the Israeli rhetoric of dehumanizing Palestinians through the elimination of marginalized groups as the *other.* It can be further explored in relation to necropolitics, as Mbembe (2019) has written on this account that when groups of people are "othered", seeing the "other" dying turns into satisfaction based on the belief that the dead person is another. It is the death of the other, the other's physical presence as a corpse. However, by placing the suffering and fears of Palestinian mothers and non-Palestinian mothers parallelly, Murad (2025) questions why a certain group of children face unfair deaths when their only crime was their mere existence.

Furthermore, the spatial dimension of occupation in relation to the Palestinian struggle has been explored in the poem "War on roots" by Ameera Abuali. Selected lines of the poem are mentioned below.

> They call it war on terror
> But terror defines the state that steals,
> That displaces, colonizes, and calls it blessed,
> That settles and shakes hands with the West
> Is terror the children, the mothers, the men
> Starved, bombed, and then buried again?
>
> They exile us, make us strangers on our own land.
> They call the state democratic and free,
> But what democracy when it's built on the wreckage of me?
>
> But we still resist.
> Here we are, here I stand
> A fascist empire built on Indigenous Palestinian land.
>
> (Abuali, 2025, lines 1–12)

Mbembe (2019) writes that territorial fragmentation is one amongst the major characteristics of the occupation in Gaza and the West Bank. It means the sealing off and expansion of settlements. This process has a twofold objective: to render all movement impossible and to implement forms of separation on the model of an apartheid state as reflected in this poem; "they exile us, make us strangers on our own land/ A fascist empire built on indigenous Palestinian land" (Abuali, 2025).

This poem can also be analysed in relation to Mbembe's concept of the politics of verticality (2019). He states that the resultant form of sovereignty might be qualified as vertical sovereignty, since under a regime of vertical sovereignty, colonial occupation operates through schemes of over and underpasses, a separation of airspace where the ground itself is divided between its crust and the subsoil. Similarly, Abuali (2025) writes in her poem; "they pick on us like vultures circling prey/ like fire through the forests, they burned what they sowed/ uprooting olives our roots for European pines that explode". These lines further reflect the territorial dimension of the genocide and the vertical sovereignty as Israel uproots the Palestinian olive trees as a means of erasure of Palestinian identity and culture (Al Jazeera, 2025) (The Palestinian Information Center, 2026). Moreover, the battlegrounds are not located solely on the Earth's surface as Israeli drones operate as psychological warfare; "they pick on us like vultures circling prey" (Abuali, 2025). Even the airspace boundaries are divided between lower and upper layers and the symbolics of who is on top are reiterated everywhere. Occupation of the skies therefore acquires critical importance, since most of the policing is done from the air (Mbembe, 2019).

Therefore, the selected poems from the *Gaza Verse* analysed from the theoretical framework of necropolitics, exemplify the lived realities of the Palestinian struggle poetically. It is further evident that the poetics of Palestinian resistance records the infra-humanization and dehumanization of Palestinian bodies and narratives while resisting against the powers of sovereignty and necropolitics.

Conclusions

In examining poetic representations of the genocide in Palestine, it becomes evident that poetry serves not only as a medium of artistic expression but also as an urgent form of testimony and resistance, since through these deeply personal narratives, poets transform collective trauma into language while refusing the erasure of their identities, histories, cultures and resistance. In addition, these poetic expressions challenge the dominant narratives misrepresenting the Palestinian struggle by rehumanizing the dehumanized groups of people, and by humanizing loss and suffering often reduced to statistics in military reports and mainstream media. These poems are in fact a timely reminder that the realities of Palestinian struggle is beyond the mainstream political discourse surrounding the genocide. The present study at the same time hints at possibilities of conducting more academic research on the genocide in Palestine, not merely for the sake of publication or documentation, but also as an extremely powerful way of resistance.

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User Experience of Virtual Reality in Lieyu Bunker Tours: Case Studies of Jiangjun Bunker and Shaxi Tunnel

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study examines how an image-based virtual reality (VR) tour platform can enhance young adults' interest in visiting Lieyu Island, Kinmen, a former military buffer zone between Taiwan and mainland China. Following the end of military administration in 1992, Lieyu has developed tourism around its natural scenery, cultural heritage, and wartime landscapes. Based on local characteristics and site accessibility, two coastal defense sites—the Jiangjun Bunker in the northeast and the Shaxi Tunnel in the southwest—were selected for platform development. The platform integrates panoramic bunker scenes with interactive markers presenting architectural, military, and historical information. The study proceeded in four stages: panoramic image capture and field documentation; platform construction with thumbnail-based navigation and hotspots; usability testing with 45 participants aged 19–28 using the System Usability Scale (SUS), the Questionnaire for User Interaction Satisfaction (QUIS), and focus group interviews; and integrated analysis. Results showed an SUS score of 84.6 (Grade B), indicating high usability and user confidence but limited intention for repeated use. QUIS results confirmed smooth system operation, while interviews suggested that simplified interactive games and two-dimensional (2D) scenic visual elements could improve engagement. The findings provide design recommendations for VR-supported heritage tourism targeting younger visitors to Lieyu.

Keywords: Lieyu bunkers, tourism interpretation, virtual reality, user experience

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Introduction

Research Background and Motivation

Lieyu Township in Kinmen County contains numerous wartime bunkers and tunnels originally constructed for military defense. However, the existing tour-guidance information on the Kinmen tourism website mainly consists of brief textual descriptions and static image lists, offering limited contextual interpretation and lacking an immersive experience. Consequently, the current presentation may be insufficient to attract younger visitor groups or stimulate their travel motivation.

In the contemporary digital environment, virtual reality (VR) technology enables tourist destinations to be presented through panoramic and immersive visual experiences, allowing users to develop a stronger sense of presence. Zhu (2014) indicated that image-based virtual reality provides high-quality visual representation and offers a more complete depiction of real environments than computer-generated virtual reality. Jiang (2019) further demonstrated that VR platforms integrating panoramic photography with embedded textual and visual information can effectively enhance learning outcomes and user satisfaction in tour-guidance contexts.

Based on these findings, this study focuses on wartime bunkers as a distinctive tourism feature of Lieyu Island. By applying the concept of an image-based VR tour platform to coastal defense sites in Lieyu, this research examines the feasibility of using VR for tourism interpretation. Through users' navigation and experiential interaction, the study aims to explore the potential of VR applications to enhance user experience and promote travel motivation toward Lieyu Island.

Research Objectives

This study designed an image-based virtual reality (VR) tour platform featuring two military heritage sites in Lieyu Township, Kinmen County: the Jiangjun Bunker and the Shaxi Tunnel. Panoramic images of both sites were captured on location in Lieyu using an Insta360 X4 camera. Relevant literature and historical materials were then collected and organized to develop textual and visual interpretive content related to former military facilities, including machine guns, firing ports, and bunker structures. The platform was designed to present Lieyu's wartime heritage in a more immersive and accessible manner, with the aim of attracting younger audiences.

After the platform was completed, usability testing and subjective evaluations were conducted based on users' interaction with the system. Young users' satisfaction and experiential responses toward different aspects of the platform were analyzed to identify potential directions for design improvement. Based on these findings, this study further proposes recommendations for applying VR-based tour guidance to enhance travel motivation among younger visitor groups to Lieyu Island.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To evaluate the usability and user experience of the image-based VR tour platform through subjective usability assessments.
2. To examine users' satisfaction with the VR tour platform and identify aspects of the tour content requiring improvement.

3. To propose design recommendations for using image-based VR to promote young visitors' travel intention toward Lieyu Island.

Literature Review

Applications of Virtual Reality in Tourism Interpretation

Previous studies have examined the relationship between virtual reality (VR), destination image, and travel motivation. Guo (2013) conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate the effects of personal characteristics, VR experiences, and destination image on travel motivation. The findings indicated that VR significantly influenced users' perceptions of destination image and effectively enhanced their motivation to travel. Similarly, Zappia (2016) used questionnaire-based evaluation criteria, including simplicity and usability, to analyze users' subjective and objective impressions of VR systems. The results confirmed that viewing information and videos through VR could strengthen visitors' engagement with heritage sites.

Jenny (2017) developed an application integrating VR and augmented reality (AR), in which tour routes were dynamically adjusted according to users' ratings of attractions. The findings suggested that combining user interests with tourism-related commercial activities could increase users' willingness to use tourism applications. Jiang (2019) further examined platform stability, interface usability, and tour content through questionnaires and interviews. The results demonstrated that VR tour platforms could improve users' understanding of tourist attractions and increase overall satisfaction with the tour experience.

Background of the Lieyu Area

Following the cross-strait division in 1949, military forces retreated from mainland China to Taiwan and its offshore islands, including Kinmen and Lieyu. After the Battle of Guningtou, Lieyu became a frontline military outpost during cross-strait tensions and played a critical role in the defense of the Taiwan Strait. The island also endured prolonged artillery bombardment. Major military events associated with Lieyu include the Battle of Guningtou in 1949, the Dadan Island Incident in 1950, the September 3 Artillery Battle in 1954, the August 23 Artillery Battle in 1958, and the June 17 Artillery Battle in 1960. The fortifications and commemorative facilities constructed during these periods have significantly shaped the historical and spatial development of Lieyu (Battle Heritage Records, 2010).

In recent years, policies returning military land to civilian use have led to the gradual release of former military sites in Lieyu. As a result, some historically significant military structures have been demolished, while many wartime bunkers remain concealed in forested areas and are often overlooked even by local residents. Limited public awareness of military heritage preservation has contributed to the gradual disappearance of Lieyu's wartime cultural identity. Therefore, documenting and reinterpreting these military landscapes has become an important issue in the preservation and promotion of Lieyu's local heritage.

Usability Evaluation

Nielsen (1993) identified five key factors for evaluating product usability: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Usability Factors

Usability Factor	Description
Learnability	The extent to which users can quickly understand system operations during initial use, reflecting interface intuitiveness.
Efficiency	The speed and effectiveness with which users complete tasks after becoming familiar with the system.
Memorability	The ability of users to regain proficiency after a period of non-use without relearning the system.
Errors	The number and severity of errors encountered during use, as well as the system's tolerance and recovery mechanisms.
Satisfaction	Users' overall pleasure, sense of accomplishment, and psychological comfort during system use.

Note. Adapted from "Usability 101: Introduction to Usability," by J. Nielsen, 2012, Nielsen Norman Group.

In addition, Nielsen (1993) proposed contextual inquiry as a method for identifying usability issues by examining users' behaviors in their natural work environments. The primary technique, contextual interviews, involves discussions between users and researchers regarding work practices, goals, and usage problems. Data collected through notes or video recordings are subsequently analyzed collaboratively by researchers and users to derive usability insights (Gao, 2004).

Research Design

Research Method and Design

System Usability Scale (SUS)

The System Usability Scale (SUS), developed by Brooke (1996), is a subjective usability questionnaire designed to measure users' overall perceived usability after interacting with a system. The SUS consists of 10 items, including five positively worded statements and five negatively worded statements. Participants respond to each item using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In this study, the wording of the original SUS items was slightly modified to better correspond to the characteristics of the image-based virtual reality (VR) tour platform. The revised items emphasized platform-related tasks and adopted wording appropriate for younger user groups, while maintaining the original structure and measurement purpose of the SUS. These modifications were made to ensure that participants could clearly understand each item and provide responses that accurately reflected their experience with the VR tour platform.

Questionnaire for User Interaction Satisfaction (QUIS)

The Questionnaire for User Interaction Satisfaction (QUIS), developed by Chin et al. (1988), is a subjective evaluation instrument designed to assess users' satisfaction with interactive systems from a human–computer interaction perspective. The questionnaire evaluates multiple interface-related dimensions, including users' overall reaction to the system, screen

presentation, terminology and system information, learning, system capabilities, and usability and user interface.

In this study, the QUIS was structured according to these six dimensions and adapted to focus on the functions and interactions of the image-based virtual reality (VR) tour platform. The questionnaire items were modified to reflect platform-specific interface features, informational content, and navigation requirements. This adaptation enabled a more comprehensive assessment of users' perceived usability, interface satisfaction, and overall experience when interacting with the VR tour platform.

Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews are a qualitative research method originally introduced by Bogardus (1926), involving group-based discussions to collect in-depth qualitative data. Following the recommendations of Stewart and Shamdasani (2001), this study conducted focus group interviews with 4–6 participants per session. A total of five sessions were held, involving 24 participants, and each session lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The participants were selected from the 45 questionnaire respondents. Selection was based on participants' level of engagement during the platform evaluation and their ability to provide detailed and meaningful feedback during discussion. Through these interviews, this study further explored users' perceptions of the image-based virtual reality (VR) tour platform, including their experiences with navigation, information presentation, interaction design, and overall travel motivation.

Research Participants

Young adults aged 20–29 have been identified as one of the least frequent visitor groups to the Kinmen region, while also demonstrating potential for increased travel intention. Therefore, this study recruited undergraduate and graduate students aged 19–28 years as research participants, maintaining an age range within a 10-year span to ensure relative consistency in demographic characteristics.

All participants first interacted with the image-based virtual reality (VR) tour platform. After completing the platform experience, they were invited to complete subjective usability and satisfaction questionnaires, user experience evaluations, and focus group interviews. This procedure enabled the study to examine participants' perceptions of the platform from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of four stages: preparation, design, evaluation, and analysis and conclusion. In the preparation stage, panoramic images were captured at the Jiangjun Bunker and the Shaxi Tunnel in Lieyu Township, Kinmen County, using an Insta360 X4 panoramic camera. Both the exterior and interior routes of the two bunkers were documented. Field investigations and a literature review were also conducted to examine the wartime context of the sites in greater depth and to develop the tour information content and interaction design for the virtual reality (VR) platform.

In the design stage, the panoramic images were imported into the Kuula virtual tour software. Viewing points, visual navigation markers, and informational text windows were configured for both the interior and exterior spaces of the bunkers. Photographs of historical weapons were overlaid onto gun platforms, and audio narration was added to complete the image-based VR tour platform with panoramic navigation.

During the evaluation stage, 45 undergraduate and graduate students participated in hands-on interaction with the VR tour platform. After using the platform, participants completed the System Usability Scale (SUS) and the Questionnaire for User Interaction Satisfaction (QUIS). Focus group interviews were then conducted to obtain in-depth qualitative insights through group discussion.

In the final stage, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to examine users' perceived usability and experience when interacting with the VR tour platform. Based on the findings, directions for design optimization were identified, and recommendations were proposed for using VR to enhance travel motivation among younger visitor groups to Lieyu Island. By synthesizing users' preferences and expectations, this study provides design references for future research and supports the cross-disciplinary application of VR in promoting tourism destinations.

Operation Flow of the Virtual Reality Tour Platform

The virtual reality (VR) tour platform comprises 30 tour viewpoints. When users launch the platform, an instruction interface appears to explain the basic operation controls, as shown in Figure 1. After reviewing the instructions, users can click the circular play icon to begin panoramic navigation and interact with elements within the bunker environment.

Figure 1

Platform Operation Instruction Interface

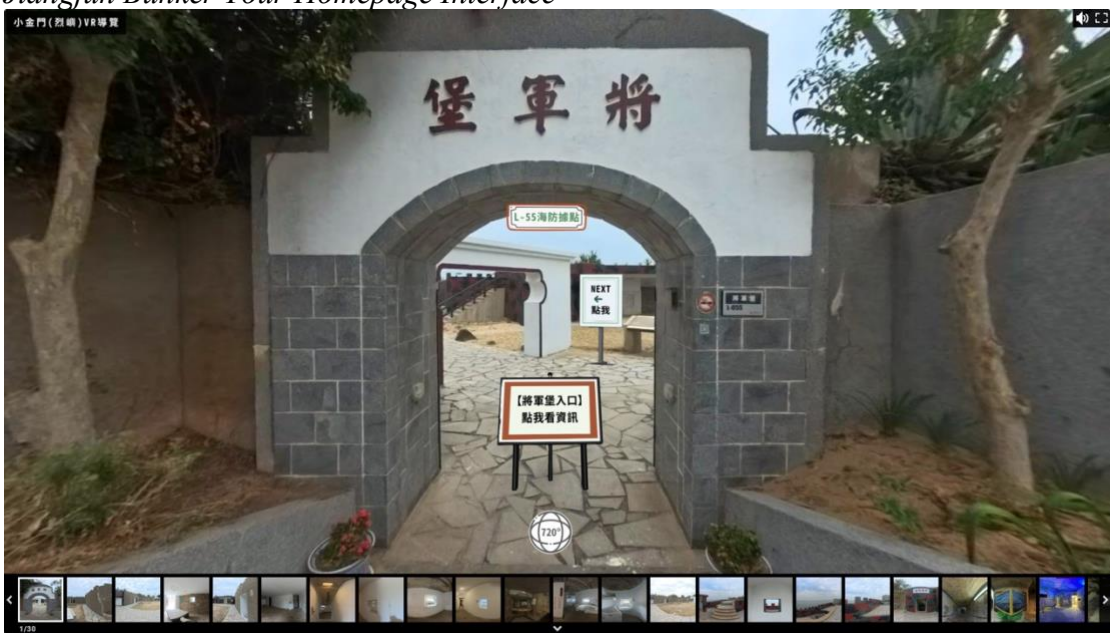


Note. Screenshot captured from the image-based virtual reality tour platform developed in this study.

Figure 2 presents panoramic view of the Jiangjun Bunker as the homepage of the VR platform, where the image is the entrance gate of the Jiangjun Bunker. Users can click the tour information panel to view explanatory content related to the site. The "NEXT" indicator allows users to move to the next tour viewpoint, while the panoramic navigation indicator reminds users that the viewing angle can be adjusted to explore environmental details. In addition, users can scroll the mouse wheel along the bottom thumbnail bar to preview and access other tour viewpoints.

Figure 2

Jiangjun Bunker Tour Homepage Interface

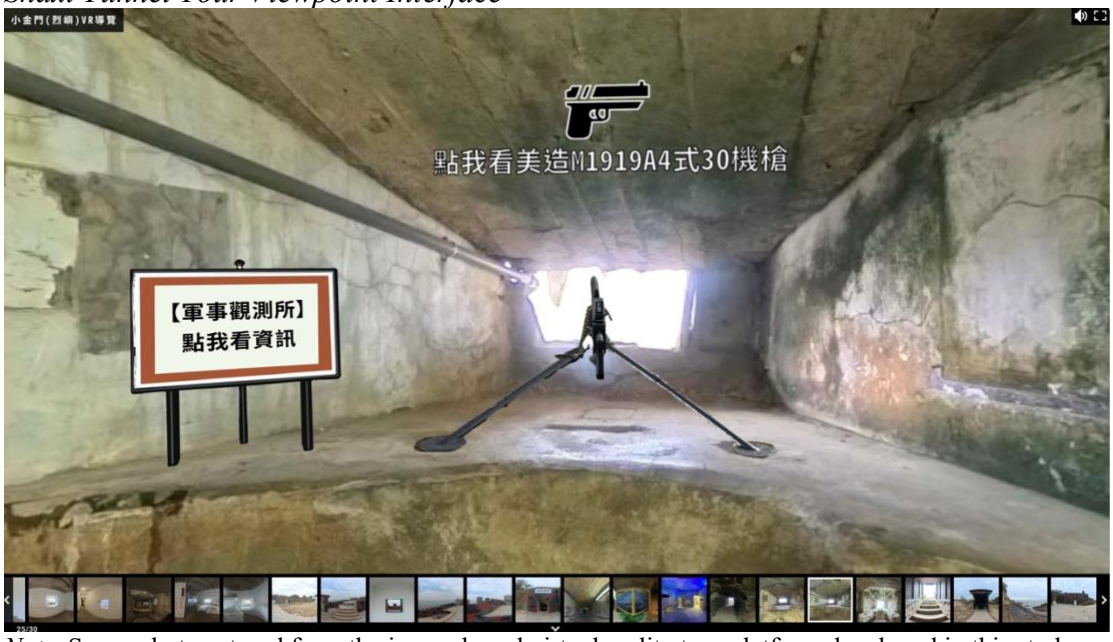


Note. Screenshot captured from the image-based virtual reality tour platform developed in this study.

At other tour viewpoints, users can interact with interface elements such as the tour information panel, weapon information panel, and overlaid weapon images. Figure 3 presents a tour viewpoint located at the machine-gun embrasure area of the Shaxi Tunnel. The upper Chinese characters explain that the machine-gun in this figure is an M1919A4 Browning machine gun, which is broadly used in Lieyu during the 1950–1980.

Figure 3

Shaxi Tunnel Tour Viewpoint Interface



Note. Screenshot captured from the image-based virtual reality tour platform developed in this study.

When users select the tour information panel on the left side of the interface, a textual explanation window appears over the panoramic scene of the current viewpoint. After reading

the description of the bunker layout in that area, users can close the window by clicking the close icon in the upper-right corner.

Users may also select the weapon information panel located above the tour viewpoint to open a weapon description window. As shown in Figure 4, the window displays an image of the wartime weapon at the center of the screen, accompanied by explanatory text.

Figure 4

Weapon Image and Text Description Window Interface



Note. Screenshot captured from the image-based virtual reality tour platform developed in this study

Results and Analysis

SUS Analysis

The overall System Usability Scale (SUS) score for the platform was 84.6, corresponding to a Grade B rating. This result indicates that the platform was generally acceptable to users and demonstrated a high level of subjective satisfaction during operation.

Based on the five-point scale used for each SUS item, the results in Table 2 show that Item S1 yielded the lowest mean score among the positively worded items, with an average of 3.93. This suggests that users expressed a relatively limited intention to reuse the same platform, indicating a need for further interface optimization. In contrast, Item S9 received the highest mean score among the positive items, with an average of 4.64, indicating that users generally felt confident in operating the platform and were able to quickly become familiar with its interaction methods.

Table 2
Overall Platform Usability (Positive Items)

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean
S1. I would like to use this platform frequently.	45	3.00	5.00	3.9333
S3. I think the platform is easy to use.	45	3.00	5.00	4.5778
S5. I think the platform is well designed, allowing me to use it smoothly.	45	3.00	5.00	4.2444
S7. I think most people could learn to use the platform very quickly.	45	4.00	5.00	4.6222
S9. I feel confident using this platform.	45	4.00	5.00	4.6444

Note. From the author's SUS experimental data results.

QUIS Data Analysis

The overall mean score of the Questionnaire for User Interaction Satisfaction (QUIS) was 6.21 out of a maximum score of 7, indicating that users generally had a positive experience with the platform. High satisfaction was reported across multiple dimensions, including audio narration, interface design, learning, system performance, and ease of use.

The QUIS consisted of 20 items, each rated on a seven-point scale. Among these items, Item Q5 received the lowest mean score, with an average of 5.51. This result suggests that users perceived the platform's method of presenting site information as relatively less engaging, and the experience did not fully meet their expectations. Detailed results are presented in Table 3, which summarizes users' overall perceptions of operating the virtual reality platform.

Table 3
Overall User Perceptions of Operating the Virtual Reality Platform

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean
Q1. I think this virtual reality platform is good.	45	4.00	7.00	6.04444
Q2. I think operating this virtual reality platform is easy.	45	3.00	7.00	6.35556
Q3. I am satisfied with this virtual reality platform.	45	3.00	7.00	5.88889
Q4. I think using this virtual reality platform helps me understand the site.	45	4.00	7.00	6.22222
Q5. I think the way this virtual reality platform presents the site is interesting.	45	4.00	7.00	5.51111

Note. From the author's QUIS experimental data results.

In the QUIS results, Item Q17 received the highest mean score, with an average of 6.62. This indicates that users were generally able to operate the virtual reality platform with ease and clearly understand the functionality of the interface. In addition, the system was perceived as stable and responsive during operation. Detailed results are presented in Table 4, which summarizes platform performance.

Table 4
Platform Performance

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean
Q15. The system performance of this virtual reality platform is smooth.	45	4.00	7.00	6.48889
Q16. The system of this virtual reality platform is stable.	45	4.00	7.00	6.55556
Q17. I can operate this virtual reality platform easily.	45	3.00	7.00	6.62222

Note. From the author's QUIS experimental data results.

Focus Group Interview Analysis

Findings from the focus group interviews provided further insight into the low intention for repeated use reflected in SUS Item S1. Participants indicated that their willingness to reuse the platform could be enhanced by incorporating simple, story-driven non-player character (NPC) interactions, in which game characters introduce site narratives and guide users to subsequent scenes.

Participants also suggested linking the Jiangjun Bunker and Shaxi Tunnel tours to other distinctive bunkers in the Kinmen area to enrich the content. Such expansion was perceived as likely to increase user engagement and encourage repeated use of the virtual reality (VR) tour platform. The following excerpts illustrate participants' perspectives on repeated use of the platform:

> **Interviewer:** Would you want to use this platform again?
>
> **Participant SA3:** No, but I would be more willing to reuse it if the experience were more story-driven. For example, if users were positioned as tourists visiting Lieyu and encountered NPC characters who introduced the site through narratives, the platform would feel more like a game and encourage reuse.
>
> **Participant SA1:** I would not use it again either. Whether I would reuse the platform depends on the content. If game-like features were added, the experience would be less monotonous, and I would be more likely to use it again.
>
> **Participant SA4:** I think the platform could be linked to other bunkers. Kinmen has many bunkers, and they are quite similar. Including images and brief explanations of other bunkers would enrich the content.

Regarding QUIS Item Q5, which reflected users' perceptions that the platform's method of presenting site information was relatively unengaging, participants expressed a desire for more in-depth introductions to the historical context and daily life associated with the bunkers. They suggested incorporating two-dimensional (2D) scenic illustrations, archival photographs, or simple line drawings to provide visual references for bunker locations and spatial relationships.

Participants also recommended designing a dedicated mascot to introduce site narratives. A character with a friendly appearance combined with lively audio narration was perceived as an effective approach to enhancing user engagement and increasing interest in exploring the platform. The following excerpts further illustrate participants' views on the presentation of tour content:

> **Interviewer:** Do you find the way the tour information is presented interesting?
>
> **Participant SA5:** Not particularly. The interaction flow feels repetitive, and toward the end it becomes tiring because I have to keep reading text, which constantly shifts my attention.
>
> **Interviewer:** How do you think the design could be more engaging?

Participant SA2: Since this is about coastal defense bunkers, I think it would be more interesting to include more information about past living conditions. Adding old photographs or scenic images around the environment, where clicking them reveals the complete space, would be helpful.

Participant SA6: Yes, I agree. Adding small stories would help. When entering a scene, a mascot could start speaking and introduce the area. That would be more engaging, because the current audio narration simply reads the text in a very straightforward way.

Conclusion

Research Conclusions

This study examined the usability and user experience of an image-based virtual reality (VR) tour platform applied to the Jiangjun Bunker and the Shaxi Tunnel in Lieyu by integrating the System Usability Scale (SUS), the Questionnaire for User Interaction Satisfaction (QUIS), and focus group interviews. The results showed an overall SUS score of 84.6, indicating strong performance in perceived usability, ease of use, learnability, user satisfaction, and system stability. Users were generally able to become familiar with the platform quickly and operate it smoothly, confirming that the platform achieved a high level of usability and provided a positive user experience.

However, the questionnaire findings also revealed relatively lower ratings for users' intention to reuse the platform and for the perceived enjoyment of the tour presentation. The focus group interview analysis further suggested that the uniform tour flow and prolonged reliance on text and audio narration led to user fatigue, which reduced users' sense of immersion and willingness to revisit the platform.

By synthesizing the quantitative and qualitative findings, this study identified several directions for platform optimization. First, narrative-driven and scenario-based design could be incorporated through virtual character-guided tours to attract younger users. Second, simple interactive mini-games and non-player characters (NPCs) could be integrated to increase engagement and reuse intention. Third, archival photographs, two-dimensional (2D) spatial reference images, and illustrative graphics could be added to reduce reading load and strengthen visual interpretation. Finally, the tour content could be extended to include other distinctive bunkers in Lieyu, thereby enhancing the depth of the platform content and the tourism value of the virtual tour experience.

Overall, the findings suggest that image-based VR has the potential to support the interpretation and promotion of military heritage tourism in Lieyu. Although the current platform demonstrated favorable usability and interaction quality, future development should place greater emphasis on narrative design, interactive mechanisms, visual enrichment, and content expansion. These improvements may further enhance young users' engagement with wartime heritage sites and increase their travel motivation toward Lieyu Island.

Future Recommendations

Based on the quantitative questionnaire analysis and focus group interviews, this study found that users generally perceived the platform as easy to use and stable in system performance.

However, further optimization is still required. Participants indicated that the tour content mainly focused on the Jiangjun Bunker and the Shaxi Tunnel, while the interaction patterns and tour flow were relatively uniform. In addition, the heavy reliance on text and audio narration limited narrative depth and interactive context. These limitations may reduce long-term engagement, intention for repeated use, and the platform's overall effectiveness in tourism promotion.

Future research is recommended to incorporate narrative-driven and scenario-based design supported by virtual characters that guide users through the experience. Simple interactive mini-games may also be integrated to increase younger users' engagement and intention to reuse the platform. In addition, visual elements such as archival photographs, scenic images, and two-dimensional (2D) spatial reference maps should be added to reduce the textual reading load and enhance users' understanding of the surrounding environment.

Moreover, expanding the tour scope to include additional distinctive bunkers in Lieyu could support the development of a series-based virtual tour. This approach may foster greater awareness of Lieyu's wartime cultural heritage among younger audiences and strengthen the tourism value of former military sites. The findings may also support cross-disciplinary applications of virtual reality (VR) in tourism interpretation and serve as a digital reference for enhancing travel motivation in future VR design practices.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support from the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), Taiwan, under Grant No. NSTC 113-2410-H-152-011.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that ChatGPT, an AI-assisted writing tool developed by OpenAI, was used to refine sentence structure and correct English spelling in the manuscript. The use of ChatGPT was limited to language polishing, spelling correction, and improving clarity and readability. Apart from ChatGPT, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing process. The ideas, research design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion presented in the manuscript are the authors' original work and were derived from a rigorous and systematic research process.

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The Activist Girl Shaped by Western Colonialism: Gloriosa in Scholastique Mukasonga's *Notre-Dame du Nil*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Notre-Dame du Nil (2021), written by Scholastique Mukasonga (1956–), is set in Rwanda in the early 1970s. It describes a boarding school modeled after the one where the author Mukasonga actually went. The students are composed of two ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi: there are divisions among them, which are rooted in western colonialism. This paper focuses on an antagonist, Gloriosa, a Hutu student whose father is a great Hutu-supremacist politician. Gloriosa acts as a *boss* at school, looking down on the Tutsi students. Gloriosa's character is shaped by her father's ideology. The father's generation experienced the period when Belgian colonialists favored Tutsi over Hutu. Hutu later achieved a rise in status, which they consider as a result of emancipation from this hierarchy. Belgium came to favor Hutu over Tutsi; the school's atmosphere reflects this new hierarchy. Gloriosa destroys the Virgin statue because of its *Tutsi-like* features, while fabricating accusations against Tutsi, which triggers chaos both inside and outside the school. Gloriosa justifies her behavior as a legitimate act to defend Hutu-supremacy like her father does in society. This chaos appears the prelude to the genocide in 1994, when Hutu committed mass violence against Tutsi. Rather than viewing the genocide through simplistic moral binaries, this presentation investigates how Belgian colonialism brought Hutu and Tutsi into long-standing conflicts, as well as producing a radical *activist* like Gloriosa who lays the groundwork for the 1994 genocide.

Keywords: Scholastique Mukasonga, *Notre-Dame du Nil*, Hutu, Tutsi, genocide

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Introduction

How western colonialism brought Hutu and Tutsi, the two major ethnicities in Rwanda, into long-standing conflicts, which laid the groundwork for the 1994 genocide, can be investigated by *Notre-Dame du Nil* (2012) [*Our Lady of the Nile*] written by Scholastique Mukasonga (1956–). The novel does not depict the genocide itself but portrays the previous tensions that foreshadow it in 1972. The genocide cannot be understood as a simple moral binary, because it is entangled with Belgian colonialism. Therefore, this paper considers how colonialism created such conflicts between these ethnicities in the long term.

The novel portrays the female boarding school, named the Lycée of Our Lady of the Nile, which shares the novel's title. This school is built by Belgian Catholics, permitting the most brilliant students in Rwanda to enroll. The Belgian Catholics also function as the economic foundation of Rwanda, which shapes the school's various hierarchies. This school is modeled after the one where the author Mukasonga actually went as a student. It enrolls students belonging to both the ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi: Hutu is the majority, while Tutsi the minority. The Tutsi students are allowed to enroll through the quota system. This school eventually describes disputes between Hutu and Tutsi students, which reflects Rwanda around 1972 as a microcosm of Rwandan society.

Scholastique Mukasonga was born in Rwanda in 1956 as Tutsi, beginning to write in 2006. In light of her birth year, Mukasonga herself experienced the 1994 genocide—in her case, she lost more than 30 members of her family and relatives while being outside Rwanda. Although this novel is narrated in third person, it appears to be described from the viewpoint of a Tutsi student, compared to Mukasonga.

During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Hutu extremists killed a vast number of Tutsi; here it is important to note that the ethnic hierarchy between Hutu and Tutsi were constructed and institutionalized by Belgian colonizers. In other words, these two ethnicities should be understood as colonial constructions rather than primordial ethnic groups; the 1994 genocide originates in Belgian colonialism. Rwanda was colonized by Belgium in the early 20th century. As a matter of fact, Belgium initially favored Tutsi, because they formed the ruling elite in those days, but there was no essential hierarchy between the two ethnicities before the colonization. In 1959—about half a century after the beginning of Belgian colonization—Hutu rebelled against Tutsi and Belgium, achieving independence from their ruling. As a consequence, Belgian colonizers came to favor Hutu, trying to dominate Rwanda together with them: Mukasonga's *Notre-Dame du Nil* describes Rwanda when it was dominated by Hutu elites under Belgian support.

Here turning to Gloriosa, the central character of this paper, Gloriosa is a Hutu student, whose father is a Hutu-supremacist politician. Throughout the narrative, she is described as an antagonist, which is from Tutsi's point of view. Her father took part in the Hutu independence movement around 1959, respected like a hero by the Hutu-supremacist group. Her father's authority makes Gloriosa act as a *boss* figure at school, often looking down on Tutsi students.

There is a statue of the Virgin in the vicinity of the school; in the climax, Gloriosa destroys the statue because she believes that it resembles a Tutsi woman. This act triggers chaos inside the school; Gloriosa escapes responsibility by fabricating a rumor that some Tutsi committed the act. In the meantime, she justifies her behavior as a legitimate act to defend Hutu-supremacy

like her father does in society. This chaos suggests a prelude to the genocide happening in about 20 years, foreshadowing Hutu extremists' violent domination of Tutsi.

Gloriosa's Original Name, Nyiramasuka

Turning to the characterization of Gloriosa, earlier in the narrative, she is described with expressions such as "well-built and big-boned," "Mastodon" and "muscular calves," all of which may present her image as a physically imposing girl. Therefore, Gloriosa is regarded as "the spitting image of her father" (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 20) by her surroundings; her name is even more significant than her physical appearance.

Gloriosa has another name "Nyiramasuka," given by her father, which signifies "She of the hoe" (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 20), or the woman of the hoe, in Kinyarwanda, the original language in Rwanda. In Rwandan history, the hoe symbolizes Hutu identity as agricultural workers; her original name thus can be interpreted as representing her ethnicity. Regarding Gloriosa's original name, Rey claims, "she has a European name…but the one at her birth is even more significant" (Rey, 2016, p. 9). Not only Gloriosa but all the girls in the school have European names, such as Veronica, Virginia, Imaculée and Gloriosa, all of which originate from Belgium. Although they are addressed by European names throughout the narrative, it is noted that they have original ones, like Nyiramasuka for Gloriosa.

The importance of their original names is evident in Gloriosa's statement: "It's not for nothing my father named me Nyiramasuka" (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 24), which clearly indicates her Hutu identity. As Reyntjens states, "This culture of conformity is shared by most Rwandans, Hutu and Tutsi, peasants and urban dwellers" (Reyntjens, 1996, p. 245), Hutu historically engaged in agriculture, while Tutsi were linked to urban life and pastoralism, which is repeatedly emphasized even in the narrative. In 1972, when Hutu was dominating the country with Belgium, it was easy for them to take pride in their agricultural identity, while looking down on Tutsi as lazy urban dwellers. Arsêne and Augustin similarly argue that Nyiramasuka suggests "the food activity of a community" and "the activity of agriculture" (Arsêne & Augustin, 2023, p. 195). These previous studies thus consider the significance of Gloriosa's original name Nyiramasuka, given by her father, in terms of history and identity.

Gloriosa's Influence of Her Father

Moreover, turning to Gloriosa's relationship with her father, her character is deeply shaped by his ideology. She frequently invokes her father in statements:

> My father says we must repeat, again and again, that the Inyenzi are still there, that they're always ready to return, that some do still get out and are among us, that the Tutsi who stayed behind eagerly await them…My father says we must never forget to frighten people. (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 155)

Here she says "my father says" twice, as well as using four *that*-clauses—Inyenzi is a derogatory term for Tutsi: Hutu used to call them like this by likening them to cockroaches. Coste points out that Gloriosa's character is shaped by her father's authority, rather than her own agency (Coste, 2013). In other words, her father's influence leads Gloriosa to look down on Tutsi students, as well as acting as the boss at school. Coste also argues that Gloriosa displays Hutu-power in a rhetorical manner (Coste, 2013), which appears to portray Gloriosa almost as her father's extension or instrument. Even considering that Gloriosa repeats "my

father" in her statements, she behaves at school as her father does in society. Furthermore, Coste identifies, "this process of reiteration is taken in Mukasonga's language" (Coste, 2013, p. 9): in *Notre-Dame du Nil*, Gloriosa's repetition of "my father" functions as this narrative device.

The climax portrays chaos both inside and outside the school as a consequence of Gloriosa's destruction of the Virgin statue: "There's been a coup d'état. The army's taken over. The former President is under house arrest…Nobody knows where Gloriosa's dad is, perhaps he fled, or else he's in prison. Everyone turned against Gloriosa, and started cursing at her…" (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 195). Gloriosa's father consequently loses his authority under the *new* regime, leading Gloriosa to bear the brunt of blame and criticism from everyone at school—she, too, loses her authority within the school.

Alongside Gloriosa's original name, Nyiramasuka, which represents Hutu identity and their historical background, previous studies focus on Gloriosa's repetition of "my father" suggesting that she functions as her father's extension, who behaves at school as he does in society. This second aspect is especially clear by focusing on Gloriosa throughout the narrative.

Gloriosa's Own Agency: Resistance to Belgium

Although Gloriosa can surely be understood as her father's extension, it is impossible to conclude that she does not have her own agency at all. For example, Gloriosa complains about the quotas for Tutsi students: "Two Tutsi for twenty pupils is the quota…As my father likes to tell me, we'll really have to get rid of these quotas one day, it's a Belgian thing!" (Mukasonga 2021, p. 25). While Gloriosa definitely says "my father" here, she emphasizes that this system is a "Belgian thing," which suggests her own agency. During the period of Belgian domination, Rwandan adults were unable to openly oppose Belgium, which would have been the same for the ones like Gloriosa's father. Even considering that the school's institutional and economic structure depends on Belgian Catholic orders, they were structurally discouraged from criticizing Belgium, the colonizer, as well as their economic foundation. However, Gloriosa shows a sense of opposition to Belgium that adults in Rwanda cannot articulate.

In addition, when the Queen of Belgium visits the school, the teachers compose a song; Gloriosa, acting as the *boss*, is in charge of censorship. Here Gloriosa gives her opinions to the teachers, criticizing "heavy praise of kings and queens unbefitting to a Republic" and instead insisting on "celebrat[ing] the farmer's hoe and the peaceful development of the country" (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 133). Rwandan adults are required to show loyalty to Belgium for the economic foundation grounded in their relationship—the *colonizer* and the *colonized*. However, Gloriosa refuses to conform to this colonial dynamic, which marks her own stance. Gloriosa believes that Hutu should be superior not only to Tutsi but also to Belgium, showing her desire as a daughter to accomplish what her father cannot even achieve.

The most significant and symbolic part throughout the narrative is Gloriosa's destruction of the Virgin statue. Her father has an ambition to "de-Tutsify schools and government" (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 151), or expel Tutsi out of them, for which she plans to destroy the *Tutsi-like* Virgin to fulfill his ambition. Here Gloriosa emphasizes the Virgin's Tutsi-like appearance, which is, however, her excuse for opposition to Belgium. In other words, this claim functions as a rhetorical justification rather than her own motive.

The Virgin originally symbolizes Christianity, introduced in Rwanda by Belgium, functioning as an emblem of Belgian colonialism. Rwandan adults, including the ones like Gloriosa's father, must not have been able to easily touch anything associated with Belgium, but Gloriosa attempts to destroy the statue, expecting her father to "congratulate" (Mukasonga, 2021, p. 151) her. This suggests that Gloriosa is not merely her father's extension but portrayed as a *small activist* within the school—the *small society*—aiming to advance Hutu-supremacy through her own resistance to Belgium, the colonizer.

Since the Virgin statue symbolizes colonialism, its destruction carries broader significance. Despite Gloriosa's bold and authoritarian attitudes, she firmly belongs to the *colonized* side in Rwanda for Belgium, the colonizer. Therefore, her act represents a form of resistance of the colonized people against the colonizers. Belgian colonialism produced the ethnic hierarchy between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, later leading to the 1994 genocide. Although Gloriosa is portrayed as an antagonist throughout the narrative, she functions as an agent of decolonial resistance who disrupts the colonial legacy that permeated Rwandan society in 1972.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how Belgian colonialism brought Hutu and Tutsi into long-standing conflicts, as well as how it contributed to the emergence of a radical *activist* like Gloriosa, who lays the groundwork for the 1994 genocide. Previous studies analyze Gloriosa as a rhetorical extension of her father, whose disappearance by a coup d'etat ultimately made her, too, lose authority at school, which mirrors his fate. In the meantime, Gloriosa is not his complete extension, but holds her own agency: opposition to Belgium, the stronger power that Rwandan adults cannot resist. Gloriosa believes that Hutu should be superior not only to Tutsi but also to Belgium, which shows her ambition as a Hutu-supremacist's daughter to fulfill what her father cannot accomplish.

In addition, Gloriosa cannot be interpreted as a perfect antagonist, but a small activist in the small society, the school, who is radicalized by her father's Hutu-supremacist ideology. Her radicalization ultimately exceeds mere imitation of her father, marking a shift from his extension to autonomous political agency. The father's ideology reflects his opposition to domination by Tutsi and Belgium, further intensified by the history that Belgium colonized Rwanda, which ethnically divided Hutu and Tutsi. Moreover, the Virgin statue symbolizes Belgian colonialism, and Gloriosa's destruction of the statue represents the disruption of colonial legacies. Here Gloriosa performs a form of resistance to colonialism throughout the narrative.

In reality, as school is frequently considered to be a small society, this boarding school also functions as a microcosm of Rwanda in 1972. The conflicts among the girls mirror those of the adults, especially their parents. Children often reflect the dynamics of adults—and like Gloriosa's case, they can be more radicalized by and than their parents—this likelihood can be discovered regardless of time or location.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Copilot, a generative AI, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from

Copilot, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Apocryphal Assumptions About Artistry and Artificial Intelligence: A Case Analysis of *Andersen v. Stability AI Ltd.*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study explores the nature and function of human artistry versus artificial intelligence via an analysis of court documents in *Andersen v. Stability AI Ltd.*, 3:23-cv-00201. Filed in the Northern District of California on January 13, 2023, this class-action lawsuit was brought by visual artists including Sarah Andersen, Kelly McKernan, and Karla Ortiz against Stability AI Ltd., Runway AI, Midjourney, and DeviantArt. Plaintiffs allege their copyrighted artworks were scraped from the internet without permission and used to train AI models to create arts. Our goal is to decipher the hidden, tacit, apocryphal assumptions about art and artificial intelligence through the framework of the Johari Window of four quadrants (Open, Blind, Hidden, Unknown). By comparing and contrasting the quadrants revealed within Plaintiff versus Respondent discourse, we will answer two research questions (RQs), *RQ1:* What are the apocryphal arguments that shape our understanding of human-derived artistry versus artificially-derived artistry? *RQ2:* How does identification of these apocryphal elements illuminate the nature, function and potential of human-derived and artificially-derived creativity? Our contribution will assist advocates on both sides of the issue to understand, and hence better respond to, counterclaims.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, artistry, apocryphal claims, diffusion, Johari Window, web scraping

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Introduction

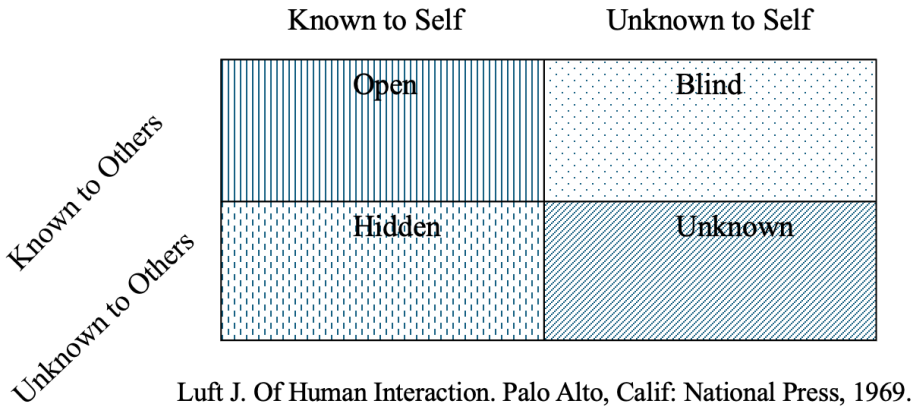
Is "Open"AI[1] really open? Or does this nomenclature disguise hidden elements and apocryphal assumptions nesting within the region of artificially-derived intelligence? If so, what are the philosophic and pragmatic implications of such assumptions?

Methodology

To analyze the court document in *Anderson v. Stability AI Ltd.,* 3:23-ev-0021, we formulate our review according to the Johari Window model developed by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (1955) as an information processing tool for self-awareness (Lowes, 2020) and to conceptualize an individual's position and relationship with others in a group (Spennemann, 2023).

The model comprises a two-by-two square table of four panes. Each pane contains informational position relating to feelings, experience, views, attitudes, skills, intentions, motivation, etc. The length of the table denotes an individual's known and unknown informational position within a group. Thus, the table can be represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Johari Window



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Analysis

The analysis and page numbers cited in this manuscript are based on:

- *United States District Court, Northern District of California. Sarah Andersen, et al. v. Stability AI Ltd., et al.*, Case No. 23-cv-00201-WHO, *Order Granting in Part and Denying in Part Motions to Dismiss First Amended Complaint*.

Open Windowpane

The Open Windowpane denotes knowledge known to all parties. In *Anderson v. Stability AI Ltd.* this pane contains the Plaintiffs' six claims filed in the case. These include: "Injunctive Relief Class," "Damages Class," "LAION-5B Damages Subclass," "LAION-400 Damages Subclass," "DeviantArt Damages Subclass," and "Midjourney Named Artist Class." The

[1] "Open"AI, in this instance, refers to a generic way to denote artificially-derived intelligence.

common core of these claims deals with bringing into the open the ways in which AI has operated in an apocryphal manner, using subterfuge as a way to harvest data from artists without their knowledge much less their permission. By scraping images and then using recombinant patterns to reassemble the images, Plaintiffs charge that Defendants have disregarded and diminished artists' rights. As standard legal practice, however, Defendants will file for judicial dismissal of certain of those Open elements.

Blind Windowpane

The Blind Windowpane denotes information known to others but unknown to self. This pane contains claims based on Stability AI Motions and other Defendants' Motions to Dismiss. The Judge has the prerogative to grant or dismiss claims against Stability. Any claims dismissed uphold elements argued by the Defense that will not be considered in the adjudication of the case.

Judge William H. Orrick rules these claims accordingly: 1. Claim Under 1202(a): "Stability argues that this claim fails because Stability's generic license does not suggest any association at all with plaintiffs' works and therefore was not made 'in connection with'" (p. 10). The claim is dismissed "with prejudice" due to plaintiffs' lack of the claim's basis. 2. Claim Under 1202(b)(1). This claim deals with intentional removal and alteration of images during the training process. It also deals with non-identicality. The Judge dismissed this claim against Stability with prejudice (p. 13). Going on to the Unjust Enrichment claim against Stability the Judge denies Stability's motion to dismiss the claim dealing with challenged copyright claims and grants the claim with leave to amend.

With respect to Runway AI Motion to Dismiss the request by Runway for judicial notice is denied (p. 16). With respect to Runway's motion to dismiss on infringement claim the motion is denied and granted with leave to amend on the unjust/enrichment claim (p. 19).

Ruling on Midjourney's motion to dismiss the Copyright the Judge denies this Defendant's motion to dismiss (p. 21). Midjourney also does not fare well in its motion to dismiss based on the Lanham Act, which is denied (p. 26). In a similar vein, Judge Orrick denies Midjourney's request for judicial notice (p. 27).

In his ruling regarding DeviantArt's motion to dismiss the Copyright Acts claim Judge Orrick denies the motion (p. 30). The breach of contract claim is dismissed with prejudice as is the unjust enrichment claim based on preemption under the Copyright Act (p. 32).

Hidden Windowpane

The Hidden Windowpane denotes known to self but an unknown to others façade. In the case of *Anderson v. Stability, AI Ltd.,* Plaintiffs contend that Defendants keep knowledge they have about the origin, structure, and function of AI-generated text and images as inaccessible to the artists credited with the genesis of such creations.

Unknown Windowpane

The unknown Windowpane is a three-pronged or tri-dimensional pane containing the blank knowledge areas unknown and inaccessible to Plaintiff, Defendants, and the Judiciary. In the case of artificially-derived and empowered intelligence the very nature of the craft secludes or

occludes areas yet to be understood or unveiled. Claude's Mythos is a prime example of such a pane: "I'm not a Chicken Little kind of person when it comes to this stuff"[2] claims Katie Moussouris, CEO and co-founder of Luta Security, expressing an unusually cautionary philosophy and praxis. As a result of this unknown power, Project Glasswing was developed to probe the unknown abilities of Anthropic's Claude Mythos, giving selected tech companies access to discover potential cybersecurity problems. In the case of *Anderson v. Stability AI*, this knowledge is kept from all parties to the dispute.

Like the Altar to the Unknown God (*Agnostos Theos)* constructed in ancient Athens, the Unknown Windowpane represents what no one yet knows about artificially-derived intelligence, either in its current manifestation or in future engineering advances. How can questions be asked when no one knows what lines of inquiry might be relevant?

Results and Discussion

Drawing upon the imagery of the Athenian Altar to the Unknown God (*Agnostos Theos)* the results of our analysis are trifold:

First, regardless of the claims about artificial intelligence brought by Plaintiffs in any current and future case contesting the scraping of AI images, the Judiciary has the power to *move* those claims from the Open Pane to the Blind Windowpane, rendering them ineligible for court consideration. The basis of Judicial granting of claims dismissal by Judge Orrick in *Anderson v. Stability AI LTD, et al,* includes insufficient, indirect, and/or irrelevant evidence. Hence, future filers of claims by parties such as *Andersen, Stability AI, Midjourney,* and *DeviantArt,* should make certain that the legal standard of proof is met in their contentions.

Second, those advocating for or against the use of artificial intelligence in a legal context might do well to consider the black box versus white box metaphor in terms of philosophy and pragmatism. Whereas the white box represents programming and distribution of AI in a manner residing in the Open Windowpane, the black box represents the current state of knowledge regarding AI: the Unknown Windowpane. As differentiated by Oliver Whang in *The New York Times* article "We don't really know how A.I. works. That's a problem," published online April 15, 2026, white box systems were open knowledge, operating on simulation and the assigning of values to certain moves. These were transparent functions, lacking mystery. In contrast, black box systems are characterized by mysterious formulae that evolve autonomously. Bots' internal structures or neural networks function in a way that is hidden even from the encoders.

Third, placing legal claims about artificial intelligence in the Johari Window indicates a need for reframing the claims. In his April 15, 2026, *The New York Times* article journalist Cade Metz, who has covered artificial intelligence for 15 years, cites the notion of "Jagged Intelligence": "How 'Jagged Intelligence' can reframe the A.I. Debate": Essentially, "jagged intelligence" captures both how sophisticated and sophomoric AI is, depending on the nature of the task before it. According to University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management Professor Dr. Joshua Gans, "The jaggedness of A.I. means that the problems can come from anywhere. . . There are gaps, and we don't always know what the gaps are." These gaps reside in Johari's Unknown Windowpane, thereby providing an area of inquiry for scholars of AI to

[2] Perlo, J. & Collier, K. (8 April 2026). "Why Anthropic won't release its new Claude Mythos AI model to the public." https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/anthropic-project-glasswing-mythos-preview-claude-gets-limited-release-rcna267234

map out the nature of the gaps and their significance in the legal realm as well as potential solvability.

Conclusion

In sum, imagine AI as a rhetor (creator and/or disseminator of messages). The messages reside in the apocryphal windowpanes signifying blind, hidden, and unknown claims about who is authorized to stipulate the operations and opportunities offered by AI (RQ1). Identifying how this rhetor is endowed by its engineers with capacities even beyond the known (open) knowledge of its progenitors might spur researchers to probe the Unknown Windowpane, thereby demystifying roles, rules, and regulatory powers in order to gain litigious control over its rapidly evolving role (RQ2).

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the University's Department of Communication and Journalism in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Michener Library for supporting this research.

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Play for Peace? South Korea's Esports Ecosystem as a Digital Soft Power Instrument for Promoting Global Citizenship

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The rapid globalization of digital entertainment has led to the emergence of esports beyond their role as entertainment tools. In the current world, esports have become a hyper-competitive global industry and a critical civic arena where cross-border identities, values and cultural practices intersect. This paper examines South Korea's highly institutionalized esports ecosystem as one of the mechanisms of interactive digital soft power. This mechanism is designed to cultivate global citizenship, facilitate cross-cultural communication and drive youth engagement. By using qualitative case study of South Korean sports-diplomacy materials, state-backed institutional frameworks and landmark public events, this paper investigates how virtual play is mobilized to shape the perceptions of transnational youth demographics. The paper integrates Joseph Nye's Soft Power theory with the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) framework, to answer the main question: "How does South Korea leverage its esports ecosystem as an interactive digital soft power instrument to foster global citizenship?" The paper argues that South Korea's esports model serves as a participatory digital platform that operationalizes the Contact Hypothesis in virtual spaces. This eventually enables a bottom-up intercultural dialogue, community-building and a shared global vocabulary. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates how digital youth cultures can transcend traditional, physical-centric sports diplomacy, offering a replicable, state-sanctioned blueprint for deploying esports to foster inclusive forms of global citizenship and transnational belonging.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, esports for development and peace, digital soft power, global citizenship, South Korea

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Introduction

The global information revolution has decentralized and leveled the international stage, by lowering market entry costs and reducing the reliance on physical resources. The revolution also turned soft power into a tool for nation branding, allowing states to proactively manage their reputation to attract foreign visitors, investments and supporters. At the same time, the expansion of the digital economy has created other forms of soft power, known as digital soft power. Under these new forms, the digital technologies including social media, big data and artificial intelligence, are being utilized to actualize public diplomacy. Similarly, the rise of the digital economy also extended sports diplomacy into the virtual realm, through esports.

South Korea has a long history as the global pioneer of soft power projection through a collaboration between the public and private sectors. For instance, President Kim Dae-jung, following the 1997 financial crisis, identified the cultural industry as the new core of economic growth. The administration significantly increased budgets and enacting the "Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion" in 1999 (Sari, 2025). Currently, South Korea is viewed as the birthplace of modern esports, presenting an institutionalized blueprint for other nations seeking to develop their own infrastructures. In 2000, South Korea created the world's first national-level esports association, KeSPA, which standardized rules and professionalized players, ahead of other countries (Chung, 2021). By integrating electronic gaming into its national branding and public diplomacy portfolio, the country has elevated esports from a commercial entertainment or subculture into a hyper-institutionalized, state-sanctioned instrument for international outreach.

This paper examines South Korea's unique esports ecosystem as a significant mechanism of interactive digital soft power. Rather than treating esports merely as a digital economy sector, this paper re-conceptualizes the Korean esports industry as a strategic, transnational platform purposefully designed to cultivate global citizenship, facilitate cross-cultural communication and institutionalize new modalities of youth engagement.

Literature Review

Soft Power and Hallyu

Joseph Nye's concept of soft power focuses on the ability to affect the behavior of others to achieve desired outcomes, emphasizing the differences with hard power. Hard power relies on coercion through military force (sticks) or inducements through economic payments (carrots). Soft power, on the other hand, relies on the capacity to influence others through attraction and persuasion (Solomon, 2014). According to Nye, a state's ability to attract others depends primarily on three resources (Solomon, 2014). First is through culture, referring to the set of practices and values that create meanings for a society. Second is through political values, where a nation gains soft power when it lives up to its stated values such as democracy and human rights, both domestically and internationally. Third is through foreign policies, where policies that are viewed as legitimate and having moral authority serve as powerful soft power assets.

South Korea has shifted from a security- and export-driven state to a collaborative mode of cultural governance that utilizes the global Hallyu (Korean Wave) as a strategic soft power resource. Within this digital K-content framework, esports emerged as an interactive, globally networked arena that amplifies South Korea's cultural visibility, especially among youth.

Esports also act as a participatory extension of the broader K-content wave, moving it beyond passive consumption to active community engagement and national branding (Bandopadhyay, 2026).

The Hallyu has expanded from early TV dramas to music, digital games and animation as key export industries. The Hallyu has evolved through four distinct periods, where each period helped expand the country's global footprint. Most of the journalists and researchers identify that Hallyu 1.0 is around the late 1990s to mid-2000s (Jang & Kim, 2024). This observation is based on the popularity of the Korean drama What is Love? in China, which was broadcast nationally via China Central Television. At the same time, Winter Sonata also successfully captivated Japanese viewers, broadcast via NHK several times between 2003 and 2004 (Jang & Kim, 2024). Hallyu 2.0 existed between mid-2000s to early 2010s, driven by the K-pop explosion and the rise of global idol groups (Jang & Kim, 2024). Driven by social networking sites and the smart phone, the vogue of Hallyu 2.0 reached worldwide, extending its influence beyond the East Asia.

In the early 2010s to 2019, Hallyu 3.0 was characterised by "K-culture", where the prefix "K" became a national brand, covering food, fashion and beauty. Hallyu 4.0, from 2019 to present, is characterized by "K-style" and global mainstreaming, with films like Parasite showcasing its influence through global digital platforms (Ganghariya et al., 2020). The main differences between Hallyu 3.0 and Hallyu 4.0 can be seen in their digital reach and platform sovereignty, where Hallyu 3.0 utilised SNS to spread K-pop and dramas globally. Hallyu 4.0, on the other side, built on the instantaneous global circulation made possible by streaming sites like Netflix (Jin et al., 2023) and specialised fan platforms like Weverse (Bollmer & Tillerson, 2025).

South Korea also leverages esports as a unique participatory extension of Hallyu, as esports also build on transnational digital infrastructures that facilitate instantaneous cultural exchange. The international esports tournaments, such as the League of Legends World Championship, serve as a tool of public diplomacy and a channel of international influence (Bandopadhyay, 2026). At the same time, elite players, for instance Faker, serve as cultural ambassadors, paralleling the diplomatic roles of K-pop icons. Unlike music and film audiences, esports fans are described as active participants who contribute to the development of the brand's identity within the game's ecosystem (Calapez et al., 2023).

The Sport for Development and Peace and Esports

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiatives commonly use the popularity of sport to attract marginalized youth and then work toward outcomes like health promotion, social inclusion and peacebuilding (Van Der Veken et al., 2020). Foundational literature in SDP describes sport as a strategic "hook" or "fly paper" designed to attract youth into structured environments, where prosocial messages can be delivered (Coalter, 2010). According to Fred Coalter (2010), how sports is utilized as an enticement can be understood through three program types: (1) plus-sport; (2) sport-plus; and (3) traditional sport. Under plus-sport programs, sport acts primarily as "fly paper" to attract youth to non-sporting interventions, with the systematic development of sport rarely a strategic aim. Sport-plus initiative adapts sports and augments them with parallel programs to maximize developmental objectives. Traditional sport model assumes that participation in sport possesses inherent developmental properties, such as character building, without requiring modified curricula.

Sports sociologists and philosophers have historically dismissed video games as legitimate sports primarily due to the "Achilles heel" of esports, which is the absence of visibly active, whole-body performance that characterizes traditional sporting ontologies. Parry (2018) argues that while gaming requires skills, it is limited to fine motor skills, such as finger and hand movements, rather than the decisive whole-body control required of an Olympic athlete. Hence, video gaming was stereotyped as a passive activity that failed to meet the "kinesthetic quality" at the hub of sport rhetoric (Witkowski, 2012), putting it as mere games rather than athletic activities (Parry, 2018). Some scholars suggest that competitive gaming operates in the "dysopticon", a concept defined by the absence of a surveyed physical body (Riatti & Thiel, 2021). Different from traditional sports which are governed by centralized bodies, the authority in gaming is often concentrated in private publishers who prioritize commercial interests rather than social behavioral standards.

Despite these historical dismissals, there is emerging work arguing that key Sport for Development and Peace mechanisms, such as social inclusion, social capital and personal development can be realized in esports. Hayday et al. (2023) locate esports within Sport for Development (SfD), proposing an "esports Sport for Development (eSfD) model" treating esports as a mechanism to support human development and social inclusion outcomes. A scoping review on esports concludes that people engage in esports for motives similar to those in traditional sports, and develop communicative, cognitive and fine-motor skills while also posing risks (Riatti & Thiel, 2023), paralleling the mixed outcome profile in SDP. At the same time, SfD initiatives are increasingly using esports as a "hook" to engage vulnerable youth (Hayday et al., 2023). For instance, esports education for vulnerable Danish youth can be interpreted as social inclusion, helping them bridge between leisure and education, acting as a "springboard to participate in new communities" (Hanghøj et al., 2025).

Global citizenship education (GCE) aims to equip people of all ages with the tools they need to build more peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies both locally and globally. Esports facilitate this through several mechanisms. The first mechanism is transnational community building (Bandopadhyay, 2026). Different from traditional media, esports foster active participation and real-time interaction, allowing the participants to form social bonds across borders. The second mechanism is through the neutralization of physical barriers. The virtual nature of esports provides a digitally standardized environment where performance is realized through avatars, offering groups marginalized by physical ability, gender or age a platform for inclusive participation (Hayday et al., 2023). The third mechanism is the fostering of global competencies. Participation in esports has been linked to the development of 21st-century skills (Jensen et al., 2024), including communication, collaboration and strategic thinking. These skills are especially essential for navigating a hyper-connected global society.

Conceptual Framework

The Strategic "Why": Utilizing Soft Power Theory

This dimension draws on Joseph Nye's conceptualization of soft power, wherein a state's influence is derived not from coercion or payment, but through the ability to shape the preferences of others by attracting them to its culture, political values, and foreign policies. Within this study, soft power theory explains the state's motivation to enhance its national image and international perception. By leveraging esports as a cultural export, the South Korean government aims to foster international affinity and strengthen its position within the global digital landscape.

The Sociological "How": Integrating the Sport for Development and Peace Framework

This dimension employs the SDP paradigm to analyze the mechanism of peace-building and social cohesion. Central to this framework is the concept of sport as a "hook" to attract diverse audiences and facilitate structured social outcomes. This research adapts the SDP framework to the digital realm, examining how organized competitive esports structures can foster intercultural contact, community building, and mutual understanding. By moving beyond the "physical bias" of traditional sport, this study posits that digital arenas serve as viable sites for achieving developmental objectives, such as global citizenship and cross-cultural communication.

Synthesis: The Convergence of Soft Power and SDP

The framework culminates by synthesizing these two approaches to address the research gap: the intersection of national branding and social development. While soft power focuses on the state's intent to cultivate international appeal, the SDP framework illuminates the mechanisms of engagement that translate this appeal into tangible social interaction. Together, they provide a multi-dimensional lens to evaluate how South Korea deploys esports as both a tool for strategic nation-branding and a vehicle for transnational peace-building. This dual-pronged approach reflects broader shifts in digital diplomacy, where states leverage esports to project cultural capital while simultaneously navigating the tensions between state-driven sovereignty and the platform-based commercial models managed by private publishers (Luguterah, 2025).

Methodology

This research adopts a single-instrumental qualitative case study design, in which the Worlds 2023 fan festival at Gwanghwamun Square functions as the empirical case selected specifically for its capacity to illuminate the theoretical propositions developed in the conceptual framework. The case boundary is defined by four-day festival operations in November 2023, encompassing both Riot Games' official event infrastructure and the Seoul Metropolitan Government's public permitting and security arrangements, as captured in the official Riot Games news release and the press reporting on the civic takeover.

Data collection triangulates three sources: (i) observational evidence from the official festival press release and Riot Games public communications; (ii) secondary media reporting describing fan attendance, demographic composition and cross-national participation at the square; and (iii) institutional documents consisting of the 1999 Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion and KeSPA's 2000 founding mandate, which together establish the policy backdrop against which the empirical events are interpreted. While primary ethnographic fieldwork was not conducted at the site, the combination of these three sources permits a structured reconstruction of the public event and its policy scaffolding within the boundaries of a publicly available dataset.

The analytical strategy is directed qualitative content analysis, in which empirical observations from the case are systematically mapped onto the theoretical propositions outlined in the conceptual framework. Specifically, each empirical observation is coded against: (a) the three resources of soft power, namely culture, political values and foreign policy; (b) the three program types of SDP, plus-sport, sport-plus and traditional sport; and (c) the structural empathy and shared participatory ritual mechanisms theorized in the

literature review. Coding decisions were documented in an audit trail to enable transparency for replication. This procedure ensures that the empirical evidence from Worlds 2023 is interpreted not as raw description, but as a critically informed illustration of how a state-sanctioned esports event can simultaneously discharge the analytical functions of soft power and SDP within a single civic infrastructure.

The methodological choice carries one explicit limitation. Worlds 2023 is a single, exceptional case granted unique civic privileges; analytic generalization, rather than statistical generalization, is therefore the valid inference mode. The aim of the analysis is not to claim that all esports events reproduce these dynamics, but to demonstrate that under specific state-sanctioned conditions, the convergence of soft power and SDP mechanisms in esports is theoretically coherent and empirically observable.

Finding

Case: Worlds 2023 at Gwanghwamun Square

In November 2023, Seoul's Gwanghwamun Square, which is known as the historic, cultural, and political heart of South Korea, was converted into four-day public fan festival celebrating the League of Legends World Championship (Riot Games, 2023). It was the first time the Seoul Metropolitan Government allowed an esports event to fully occupy the arena, making it one of the historic milestones. Historically, Gwanghwamun Square has been reserved for monumental national events, political demonstrations and profound cultural displays. The South Korean state signaled a shift in its nation-branding strategy by dedicating this physical center to a virtual tournament. The event offers a case study of how digital sport can be integrated into physical spaces to achieve the core objectives of the SDP framework.

Traditional SDP literature emphasizes the importance of community spaces in post-conflict zones. The Gwanghwamun Square reframes this geographical constraint. The South Korean government utilised its advanced national telecommunications network, turning an existing urban space into a digital amphitheater instead of building a separate physical infrastructure. The large-scale viewing screens, gaming zones and cultural exhibition booths replaced the traditional sports fields, demonstrating how esports function within the SDP framework. Esports serves as the "Hook", capturing the youth attention by operating entirely within its dominant cultural language. At the same time, the public takeover brought the digital experience directly into the open air, exposing diverse demographics to the collaborative dynamics of competitive gaming. This helps fulfill the SDP mandate of deploying sport as a mass public engagement mechanism.

Another core pillar of the SDP framework is universal access, which ensures that socio-economic barriers do not limit participation. In traditional international sporting events, some marginalized groups are often excluded due to high ticket prices and limited access to elite stadiums. In order to address this limitation, the Seoul Metropolitan Government made the Gwanghwamun Square festival free and open to the public. The venue served as a street viewing party, providing a free option for fans to watch the event on a large screen. The layout allowed thousands of international tourists, local youths and casual passersby to mingle on equal footing.

South Korea has increasingly utilized interactive and participatory cultural initiatives to enhance its international presence. With the establishment of a highly accessible public zone,

the state cultivated a sense of global citizenship. This can be seen where fans from different nationalities not only watched a screen, but also actively participated in a shared global "ritual". This shared participation built mutual empathy and a unified, transnational youth identity that bridges linguistic and geographic diversity. At the same time, during the tournament, the square became a neutral ground where the typical geopolitical friction of Northeast Asia was minimized. Fans from China, Japan, South Korea and other states stood side-by-side, wearing the same team apparel, celebrating the same in-game achievement.

By hosting the event, South Korean demonstrated a movement beyond the cessation of hostilities characteristics of negative peace. Instead, they bring it toward the structural integration that defined as positive peace (Galtung, 1969). The shared cross-cultural celebration in a highly symbolic civic space marked beyond the absence of conflict. At the same time, it serve as the generation of structural empathy among global youth, representing one of the first cases in which cooperative contact was deliberately cultivated within an entirely digital, commercially governed arena.

Discussion

Restating the central question, South Korea leverages its esports ecosystem as an instrument of interactive digital soft power to foster global citizenship. First, the South Korean government institutionalizing competitive esports as a state-supported cultural export within the Hallyu portfolio, communicating national brand value through culture rather than coercion. Second, the opening of digital arena to physical civic space, as demonstrated by the 2023 takeover of Gwanghwamun Square, allow the conversion of esports from a spectator esport into a contact-based. This structured participation ritual makes the transnational empathy becomes an observable and replicable social outcome.

A persistent objection within sports sociology argues that competitive gaming lacks the ontological legitimacy of "true" sport. Parry (2018) contends that esports depend on fine motor skills alone, rather than the decisive whole-body control that defines Olympic competition, while Witkowski (2012) and Riatti and Thiel (2021) extend the critique by characterizing esports as operating in a "dysopticon", defined as an environment governed by commercial publishers rather than centralized sport bodies. At the same time, the surveyed physical body itself is absent. The Worlds 2023 case does not refute these distinctions, instead, it relocates them. The Gwanghwamun takeover demonstrated that the developmental mechanisms identified in SDP scholarship, such as universal access, structured social interaction and public community building, do not require whole-body physical exertion to be operationalized. What the Square substituted for "kinesthetic quality" was the participatory co-presence of diverse national bodies at a shared civic screen. For instance, the Chinese, Japanese and Korean fans stood side-by-side wearing identical team apparel, in identical structured rules, inside an identical physical demarcation of public space. The findings therefore suggest that the developmental logic of sport is more portable than its ontological definition has assumed, where a portability that the eSfD framework explicitly anticipates.

The transition from the passive cultural consumption of early Hallyu generations to the interactive engagement of esports signalled that South Korea does not merely project its culture. At the same time, South Korea provides a highly regulated and structural space, allowing international youth to actively participate. Instead, it is anchored in the state's capacity to build inclusive, democratic and technologically advanced platforms that address the social needs of a globalized digital youth culture.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the intersection of digital soft power, sports sociology, and public diplomacy and addresses a central question. By analyzing the South Korean esports ecosystem through the dual lenses of Joseph Nye's Soft Power theory and the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) framework, this study illuminates a structural evolution in international relations. South Korea's intentional orchestration of virtual environments proves that esports is no longer merely a commercial enterprise or a sedentary pastime. Instead, it serves as a highly institutionalized, interactive soft power mechanism capable of fostering global citizenship, cross-cultural communication, and deep youth engagement. The empirical evidence gathered from the civic takeover of Worlds 2023 at Gwanghwamun Square challenges the traditional physical-centric bias of SDP scholarship. South Korea demonstrates that the social benefits traditionally attributed to physical sports, such as the creation of democratic safe spaces, adherence to universal rules and the generation of communitas, are also fully reproducible within digital spaces. By shifting the definition of SDP from physical exertion to game-structured socialization, this paper provides a new theoretical paradigm: Esports for Development and Peace (eSfD). Through eSfD, virtual competition successfully humanizes the geopolitical "other" and builds a shared global vocabulary among transnational youth, offering a definitive, empirical confirmation that peace can indeed be achieved digitally through play.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research. The author also used Quill Bot to refine word choice and to generate alternative phrasings of selected passages during drafting. The output was reviewed, edited, and where necessary rewritten by the author

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Addressing the Malaysian Doctor Brain Drain Phenomenon: Analysis of Singapore Recruitment Issues and Proposed Solutions

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The exodus of Malaysian doctors has accelerated due to Singapore's lucrative remuneration and stable employment prospects. This study highlights the key factors driving medical professionals to relocate, including wage disparities, excessive workloads, and contract-based employment. Research indicates that Malaysia's healthcare system is plagued by structural deficiencies that drive doctors to leave the country despite extensive national investment in their education. Competing solely on wages is untenable. Therefore, Malaysia must revamp its employment framework, promote postgraduate opportunities, and strengthen working conditions. This article also advocates implementing a "brain circulation" method that leverages the expertise of Malaysia's medical professionals abroad through telemedicine and collaboration. Hence, maintaining talent requires a long-term strategy that guarantees professional development and innovation in healthcare, rather than temporary incentives.

Keywords: Malaysia, brain drain, healthcare, Singapore recruitment, medical professionals, policy reform

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Introduction

The issue of brain drain, or the immigration of highly skilled workers, remains a concern for Malaysia. The problem worsened recently when Singapore actively offered Malaysian specialists who wanted to work in its healthcare sector salaries of up to SGD 110,000 per year (Sinar Harian, 2025). This appealing offer raises major concerns, as it could accelerate the outflow of doctors from Malaysia at a time when the nation still fails to meet the World Health Organization (WHO) – recommended doctor-to-population ratio.

Despite Malaysia's major investment in training medical practitioners, high-wage offers and enhanced career stability abroad, especially in Singapore, make local medical professionals vulnerable to recruitment. The challenge Malaysia faces is not merely Singapore's higher salaries but the inherent flaws in its local healthcare system, which foreign recruiters can exploit to their advantage. It examines how income discrepancies, contract-based employment, restricted professional opportunities, and fragile innovation ecosystems drive emigration. In 2024, Singapore's official data indicated a ratio of 29 doctors per 10,000 individuals (Ministry of Health, 2025). In Malaysia, official data indicated that in 2019 the country had 2.0 doctors per 1,000 individuals, equivalent to 20 doctors per 10,000 people (World Bank, 2021).

This comparison highlights a significant disparity in physician enrollment between Malaysia and Singapore, underscoring that Singapore's recruitment strategy places a significant strain on Malaysia's healthcare system. The primary factor is wage inequality. A medical doctor in Malaysia with three years of experience often receives an annual salary of RM 72,000, whereas in Singapore, the figure is RM 385,000 (The Straits Times, 2025). Initially, these findings may suggest that brain drain is an inescapable economic outcome. Salaries just reflect the surface layer of a larger systemic problem. A notable concern is Malaysia's reliance on contract-based employment for junior physicians. Established in 2016 as a temporary measure, the contractual arrangement has led to many young physicians without guarantees of permanent employment. The Malaysian Medical Association is pushing to abolish the contract system and restore permanent positions for healthcare workers, as the current system lacks job security, prompting medical professionals to seek more stable options elsewhere (The Star, 2025).

Theoretical Framework and Global Perspective

This study employs Lee's (1966) Push and Pull Theory to justify the rise in migration of Malaysian medical professionals to Singapore. This theory posits that an individual's decision to migrate is shaped by two primary categories of influences: push factors in the country of origin and pull factors in the destination country. These factors significantly influence the migratory patterns of skilled professionals, including physicians and medical experts.

In Malaysia, various push factors have compelled doctors to seek employment opportunities abroad. This encompasses concerns over lower competitive compensation relative to neighbouring nations, restricted advancement prospects, excessive workloads, and ambiguity in career trajectories, particularly for contract medical officers. Moreover, the absence of specialised training options and arduous working conditions further exacerbate unhappiness among young physicians (OECD, 2024). These circumstances provide a compelling motivation for people to consider relocating to countries that offer better employment opportunities.

Concurrently, Singapore offers numerous appealing attributes that make it a favoured destination for Malaysian physicians. These include higher earnings, more stable, permanent

career prospects, modern healthcare facilities, and access to advanced training and professional development. Moreover, the proximate geographical location, specific cultural affinities, and the prevalent usage of English within the healthcare sector further ease the acclimatisation of Malaysian physicians in Singapore (Ravenhill, 2020).

This phenomenon has considerable ramifications for Malaysia. The Malaysian government allocates substantial resources for each doctor's training, estimated at RM1 million per doctor. Nevertheless, a portion of this proficient labour migrates to other nations that provide more appealing incentives (OECD, 2024). This circumstance may result in a deficiency of medical personnel in the nation, hence impacting the quality of healthcare services provided to the populace.

The Push and Pull Theory elucidates that the migration of Malaysian doctors to Singapore is not merely an individual choice, but rather a consequence of the interplay between push factors in Malaysia and pull factors in Singapore. Consequently, initiatives to mitigate the brain drain phenomenon necessitate enhanced employment policies, refined incentive structures, well-defined career trajectories, and a more favorable work environment to guarantee that medical professionals remain in the country.

Root Issues

The study revealed that “over fifty per cent of Malaysian healthcare workers in this sample encountered burnout,” attributing workload (extended hours) as a main cause of stress and frustration among Malaysian healthcare workers, with burnout consistently predicting the intention to move (Roslan et al., 2021). The Malaysian government expressed significant concerns about Singapore's direct recruitment of Malaysian medical professionals, emphasising that appealing compensation packages abroad could exacerbate the existing brain drain and burden the domestic healthcare system (Free Malaysia Today, 2025). The professional environment abroad is more favourable due to its advancement.

The structure's limitations are unintentionally “exporting” Malaysia's most talented individuals. Taken as a whole, intangible yet increasingly significant aspects such as opportunities for creativity, workplace acknowledgement, and organisational culture contribute to the overall impact. Singapore has established itself as a centre for digital health by incorporating artificial intelligence into healthcare provision. It emphasises the transformative impact of AI technologies on diagnostics, predictive analytics, and patient monitoring, with governmental support for telemedicine efforts. This amalgamation of investment in AI and digital health infrastructure fortifies Singapore's position as a leader in medical innovation (Liu et al., 2020).

On top of that, Malaysia is not as far along as other countries in terms of incorporating technology into the healthcare industry. On the other hand, Malaysia appears unable to compete with Singapore in providing a future for younger physicians who prioritize professional advancement in groundbreaking fields. The exodus of medical professionals has several complicated repercussions for Malaysia.

The most immediate consequence is a deficiency of healthcare workers, especially in public hospitals and rural regions. This compromises the accessibility and quality of healthcare. Patients experience extended wait times, while professionals remain overworked, creating a cycle of burnout and frustration. The economic impact is significant. The expected cost of

training a doctor in Malaysia is approximately RM 1 million in public funding (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2021). Each medical professional who quits signifies a significant shift of taxpayer investment to the advantage of another nation. This situation highlights not only a financial burden but also a significant discrepancy between governmental expenditure and national revenue. The deterioration of public trust is equally serious. As worker shortages worsen, people report poor standards in public hospitals, increasing the need for private healthcare. This exacerbates inequality because the private sector treats the wealthy promptly while neglecting disadvantaged groups. On a systemic level, brain drain affects Malaysia's ability for medical research and innovation. Specialists and high-achieving doctors who emigrate weaken the nation's capacity to generate knowledge, secure foreign research funding, or develop innovative healthcare frameworks. This gradually undermines Malaysia's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy.

Governance and Policy Weaknesses in Malaysia's Healthcare System

Governance is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and efficacy of Malaysia's healthcare workforce. Despite Malaysia's extensive investment in medical education over the years, issues have emerged about management and planning. These factors hinder the retention of physicians within the public healthcare system. The issue transcends financial concerns; it also illustrates systemic deficiencies in the healthcare system, such as sluggish decision-making, ambiguous regulations, and insufficient operational transparency. In addition, a significant challenge is the disunity in employment policies between the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Public Service Department (PSD).

There have been many policy changes, such as the shift from permanent jobs to temporary contracts, which have left medical officers unclear about their status (Ismail, 2023). The absence of defined transition pathways and promotion frameworks has diminished morale, prohibiting numerous young doctors from continuing in public service. The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA, 2023) reports that more than 1,500 doctors have left since 2021, citing job insecurity and fatigue as the primary reasons for their departures. According to good governance theory, accountability and effective public health policy necessitate transparency and merit-based advancement (Kaufmann et al., 2019). However, Malaysia's decision-making is often centralized and opaque, restricting healthcare professionals' involvement in policy development. The lack of performance-based assessments and sluggish administrative processes delays career progression, resulting in perceived inequities and professional dissatisfaction.

Another important problem is the poor teamwork between federal and state health officials. As a result, there are many overlapping duties and mixed approaches to managing healthcare workers (WHO, 2022). For instance, hiring goals and the number of workers assigned often don't align with the real needs of different areas. This causes a mismatch between hospitals in cities and those in rural areas. This kind of problem makes the whole system less prepared, especially during big crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, insufficient transparent data makes it hard to develop policies based on real evidence. Without a central database for the health workforce, it's difficult to track how doctors are spread out, how many leave the field, and how well training programs are working. The OECD (2024) Global Talent Mobility Report says that using data for good governance is key to keeping skilled workers. It helps governments spot problems and create better solutions. To fix these governance problems, Malaysia needs to go beyond quick fixes and develop a

complete plan for the health workforce. Ensuring institutions are accountable, using digital tools to manage the workforce, and setting clear career paths can help restore confidence and prevent skilled professionals from leaving. Good governance isn't just about managing things; it's the base for long-term stability and success in Malaysia's healthcare system.

To prevent the medical brain drain, Malaysia requires initiatives focused on systemic reform rather than temporary solutions. Competing based only on income is impractical; rather, governments must promote a healthy professional ecosystem. The contract system needs revision. Ensuring clear routes to permanent work is crucial. In the absence of employment security, no benefits package may deter doctors from pursuing alternative options. The government must establish explicit criteria for the transition from contract to permanent status, supported by public evaluations. Secondly, remuneration frameworks must be reassessed, not necessarily to align with Singapore, but to enhance competitiveness. Non-wage benefits, such as housing allowances, comprehensive health insurance, and performance-based incentives, can enhance job satisfaction. Significantly, rural service incentives may alleviate persistent shortages beyond urban areas.

Malaysia must substantially increase postgraduate training positions and specialist pathways. Collaborations with overseas universities could enable professionals to acquire global experience while maintaining connections with Malaysia. Exchange-based training programs, accompanied by return obligations, would ensure that specialized talent ultimately benefits the domestic system.

In addition, improvements in working conditions are necessary. Lowering workloads by employing support personnel, digitizing patient management, and optimizing resource allocation will reduce burnout. Mental health support and flexible leave policies should be standardized within the healthcare industry. Fifth, Malaysia ought to implement a policy for diaspora and brain circulation. Not all doctors overseas can or will return, although their experience may still be utilized through visiting consultancy positions, joint research, or telemedicine networks (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). Rather than perceiving emigration as a definitive loss, Malaysia may conceptualize it as an opportunity for the exchange of information and skills. The government must allocate resources toward digital health innovation. Malaysia has the capacity to establish itself as a regional center for telemedicine and medical technology. This approach would not only retain younger professionals but also attract international talent and investment. Innovation ecosystems foster professional pride and mitigate thoughts of stagnation that frequently prompt relocation.

The strong recruitment of Malaysian physicians by Singapore highlights the systemic weaknesses of Malaysia's healthcare system. Despite the frequent mention of wage inequities, the underlying concerns are contract-based employment, limited specialized prospects, excessive workloads, and inadequate innovation ecosystems. It argues that Malaysia ought to relocate from reactive methods to proactive structural improvements. Retention tactics should extend beyond mere compensation to cultivate a sustainable medical community that prioritizes security, professional growth, and innovation. Directly competing with Singapore on wages is useless; creating an appealing and supportive healthcare environment is the sole practical strategy moving forward.

If Malaysia can reform its healthcare sector to provide long-term stability, international prospects, and significant acknowledgment, physicians will remain not out of duty but out of conviction. This method would mitigate brain drain and enhance the resilience of Malaysia's

healthcare system, assuring equitable and sustainable service for the nation's population in the coming decades.

Impact on National Development and Human Capital

The ongoing emigration of Malaysian doctors to Singapore poses challenges to the country's long-term development objectives. The Twelfth Malaysia Plan (RMK-12) targets "Strengthening Healthcare Services" and "Building Resilient Human Capital" as vital national objectives (EPU, 2021). The constant exodus of qualified healthcare workers significantly erodes these goals by eroding Malaysia's healthcare delivery system and reducing institutional capacity for innovation, medical research, and quality care. The exodus adversely impacts service delivery and affects Malaysia's return on public investment in education. The Ministry of Health Malaysia (2021) asserts that training a medical practitioner locally costs around RM1 million. The emigration of these specialists to Singapore and other wealthy countries represents a significant intellectual deficit and a substantial financial burden. This deficit is exacerbated by limiting postgraduate opportunities, a lack of structured career progression, and systemic difficulties in Malaysia's healthcare governance (Ismail, 2023).

This migration trend jeopardises Malaysia's capacity to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG): Good Health and Well-Being. The objective mandates universal healthcare access and a sufficient health workforce to provide equitable service provision (United Nations, 2022). As the number of doctors working in public hospitals decreases, the patient-to-doctor ratio increases, especially in rural hospitals. This imbalance causes exhaustion among staff and weakens the country's ability to handle health crises, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2022). Moreover, the absence of proficient doctors undermines Malaysia's research and innovation framework. Healthcare workers who migrate internationally frequently strengthen research partnerships and technological advancements in their host nations. This trend intensifies Malaysia's reliance on foreign knowledge, constraining the country's competitiveness in biomedical research and pharmaceutical innovation (OECD, 2024).

In addition, the relocation of young and mid-career doctors contributes to a generational gap in the leadership and mentoring of medical professionals. The lack of senior figures in teaching hospitals limits these facilities' capacity to train new doctors, posing a threat to Malaysia's ability to maintain a steady supply of medical professionals in the long term. On top of that, gender factors come into play, which research suggests that female doctors have a more difficult time juggling the demands of their work schedules with the obligations they have to their families, which increases the possibility that they will leave their profession (MMA, 2023). To reverse these impacts, Malaysia needs to bring talent retention into its Malaysia MADANI initiative, thereby emphasising innovation-driven healthcare, professional recognition, and balanced workload allocation. Brain drain can be transformed into brain circulation by enhancing postgraduate pathways, enabling flexible career alternatives, and developing bilateral partnerships with Singapore through telemedicine and joint research. This would allow for the utilisation of overseas experience for the benefit of domestic institutions. Therefore, maintaining human capital is not only a social obligation but also an essential component of Malaysia's long-term national resilience and competitiveness.

Conclusion

The migration of Malaysian doctors to other countries reveals a deeper structural issue within Malaysia's healthcare administration and labour market dynamics. Even though personal

incentives such as higher wages, job security, and improved working conditions propel this movement, the fundamental causes are institutional and systemic. The study from a neo-mercantilist perspective reveals that state rivalry for skilled human capital has influenced the regional healthcare environment, with Singapore effectively utilising Malaysia's educational spending for its economic benefit (Balaam & Dillman, 2022). The topic of brain drain entails complex repercussions, which are institutional, economic, and developmental. The persistent migration of qualified doctors from Malaysia results in economic detriment, lost innovative potential, and exacerbated health inequities between urban and rural areas (Ismail, 2023). The lack of balance not only diminishes Malaysia's capacity to reach Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG) in fostering good health and well-being but also impacts the overarching aims of the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (RMK-12) and the Malaysia MADANI target for inclusive growth (EPU, 2021; United Nations, 2022).

Addressing this dilemma involves more than temporary wage modifications or salary modifications. Malaysia must establish an effective, comprehensive retention strategy that includes governance reform, competitive work conditions, and transparent promotion processes. Improving postgraduate education, investing in digital healthcare innovation, and fostering bilateral engagement with Singapore through telemedicine and academic exchange could convert brain drain into brain circulation (OECD, 2024). The retention of medical workers is not merely a framework concern but a national imperative. The sustainability of Malaysia's healthcare system, and thus its human capital development, depends on the capacity of the government to transform governance shortcomings into reform chances, ensuring that Malaysian skills favor national progress rather than enhancing another nation's prosperity.

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Thich Nhat Hanh's Concept of Practice: Its Origins, Meaning, and Function in Engaged Buddhism and Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper explores Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of "practice" as a possible key to understanding the relationship between his wartime Engaged Buddhism, later mindfulness teaching, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Through a literature-based analysis in intellectual history, it examines his peace appeals during the Vietnam War, his reflections on mindfulness, and Living Buddha, Living Christ. The paper focuses on how Nhat Hanh repeatedly uses practice not simply as the application of doctrine, but as an embodied way of returning to the living source of religion. In wartime Vietnam, this orientation appeared in relief work, peace activism, and interreligious cooperation. In his later writings, it was further developed through his interpretation of the living Buddha, the living Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Rather than presenting a final conclusion, this paper offers a preliminary framework for further research. It suggests that a fuller understanding of Nhat Hanh's concept of practice requires closer examination of his own writings, Vietnamese Buddhist terminology and context, and the development of his postwar activities in exile.

Keywords: Thich Nhat Hanh, practice, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Holy Spirit, Engaged Buddhism

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Introduction: Research Question and Method

Thich Nhat Hanh (Thích Nhất Hạnh, 1926–2022), a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist, is widely known for his religious and social activities, such as his peace work during the Vietnam War, Engaged Buddhism, and his teachings on mindfulness. Throughout his long life, he worked worldwide, and during the Vietnam War, his influential activities were partly supported and fostered by interreligious relations, especially with American Christianity (Deer Park Monastery, n.d.; Plum Village, n.d.).

This paper revisits the thought of Thich Nhat Hanh by focusing on one key concept: practice. It aims to show how his peace activities during the Vietnam War, his later mindfulness teaching, and his interreligious writings form a coherent whole, rather than separate phases. For Thich Nhat Hanh, practice is a methodological principle for understanding religion itself. This perspective develops from concrete social practice into an interreligious theoretical framework. Rooted in the context of the Vietnam War, his understanding of practice emerged from his concrete actions for peace and his firsthand experience of social suffering.

This paper addresses two questions. First, what does "practice" mean in Thich Nhat Hanh's thought? Second, how did it develop from wartime Engaged Buddhism to Buddhist-Christian dialogue? To answer these questions, this paper examines his wartime activities, his postwar mindfulness practice, and his later work *Living Buddha, Living Christ*.

The research method is a literature-based analysis in the field of intellectual history. This paper mainly examines his appeals for peace during the Vietnam War, his postwar mindfulness practice, and his later writings on Christianity.

Previous Studies and the Focus on Practice

Thich Nhat Hanh is widely known for Engaged Buddhism, the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War, peace work, and mindfulness. This section reviews selected studies related to these topics. These previous studies can be grouped into four perspectives: the historical definition of Engaged Buddhism, the wartime formation of Nhat Hanh's practice, its transnational and interreligious expansion, and its later or contemporary applications.

Regarding Engaged Buddhism, Sallie King names Nhat Hanh as one of the representative figures of this movement (S. B. King, 2009, p. 2). According to Christopher Queen, Engaged Buddhism emerged as a modern Buddhist movement in the 1950s and 1960s, when Buddhist activists in Asia began to address social suffering and social change. Queen identifies its distinctive features in its connection with modern notions such as human rights, social justice, nonviolent protest, peacemaking, institutional reform, and systemic social change. In this context, Thich Nhat Hanh is regarded as one of the representative figures of Engaged Buddhism (Queen, 2023, pp. 71, 73–74). Queen also notes that the term "engaged Buddhism" was first used by Thich Nhat Hanh to describe the nonviolent anti-war movement led by monastics in Vietnam in the 1960s (Queen, 2023, p. 77).

Other studies focus more directly on the wartime formation and wider reach of Nhat Hanh's practice. Victor Thasiah also interprets Thich Nhat Hanh's wartime Buddhist practice through the idea of "ecological humanism." He argues that Nhat Hanh's identification with nature was not merely a source of personal healing, but also part of the spiritual basis that sustained his

humanitarian service and nonviolent resistance during the Vietnam War (Thasiah, 2022, pp. 41–43).

Sharon Luk reads the encounter between Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr. as an intersection between Engaged Buddhism and Black liberation thought in the United States from 1965 to 1968. She argues that Hanh's Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire and his dialogue with King helped shape King's turn toward a broader anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist critique, especially in his 1967 speech "Beyond Vietnam." Hanh's encounter with King further globalized this framework, helping King connect the Vietnam War, U.S. imperialism, capitalist exploitation, Third World suffering, and social and economic injustice within the United States. This article shows that Hanh's practice was not only Buddhist social action, but also part of a wider interreligious and transnational formation of peace thought (Luk, 2018).

Sallie B. King's article further shows that Engaged Buddhism also reached other religious peace traditions in the United States. King's article shows that Engaged Buddhism, initiated by Thich Nhat Hanh, was not confined to Vietnamese Buddhism during the Vietnam War but also influenced Quakers in the United States. King examines the cases of the Buddhist Nhất Chi Mai, who carried out self-immolation in protest against the Vietnam War in 1967, and the Quaker Norman Morrison, who did so in 1965, and compares how these acts can be understood religiously and ethically. With regard to Nhất Chi Mai, King confirms that she was a lay disciple of Thich Nhat Hanh and a member of the Order of Interbeing, which he founded. King also refers to Thich Nhat Hanh's Buddhist interpretation of Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation (S. B. King, 2000).

A different approach is found in Robert H. King's monograph, which connects Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism with Christian monastic spirituality and Buddhist-Christian dialogue. King connects Thich Nhat Hanh with the Catholic monk Thomas Merton, who met him in 1966 and helped introduce his thought and activities within the context of Christian intellectual circles and the peace movement in the United States, from the perspective of "engaged spirituality." In doing so, King discusses the development of Buddhist-Christian dialogue through the intellectual trajectories of these two figures. King conceptualizes Engaged Buddhism as a continuous development extending from social practice during the Vietnam War to Nhat Hanh's later mindfulness practices and community formation. In this respect, King's study shows that "practice" in Nhat Hanh's thought is an underlying concept that runs through social engagement, everyday mindfulness, and interreligious dialogue (R. H. King, 2001).

Recent studies have also applied Nhat Hanh's thought to contemporary practical and ethical contexts. Yetunde's study is an attempt to apply Thich Nhat Hanh's thought to spiritual care for transgender patients provided by chaplains and religious care providers in medical settings in the United States. The distinctive feature of this study lies in its effort to identify the necessity and practical path of spiritual care for transgender patients, who tend to be overlooked within the legal and political context of religious freedom in the United States, from the perspectives of Buddhism, Christianity, and womanist theology. In particular, Thich Nhat Hanh's thought is used as a spiritual and ethical framework for supporting spiritual care for transgender patients. However, this study only indicates the possibility of the contemporary application of Nhat Hanh's thought; it does not discuss the formation process or intellectual-historical development of his concept of "practice" (Yetunde, 2020).

Taken together, these studies have clarified Nhat Hanh's importance in Engaged Buddhism, wartime peace activism, interreligious and transnational peace thought, Buddhist-Christian

dialogue, and contemporary applications of his thought. At this stage, the previous studies still need to be examined more carefully. However, this paper begins from the working assumption that the concept of practice itself has not yet been sufficiently analyzed as a central concept connecting his wartime social engagement, postwar mindfulness, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

What Does "Practice" Mean?

For Thich Nhat Hanh, practice means returning to the living source of religion through embodied imitation of the Buddha or Jesus. Here, "living" does not mean symbolic or metaphorical. It means that the Buddha and Jesus are encountered where their way is embodied in practice.

In *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that authentic fidelity to Jesus or the Buddha lies in practice rather than abstract ideas. He writes, "We must practice living deeply, loving, and acting with charity" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, p. 56). To honor Jesus is to live deeply, to love, and to act with charity. True teaching is not static or reducible to words; it is the reality of life. Doctrines or concepts without this grounding remain disconnected from real life.

From this perspective, he highlights a fundamental convergence between Buddhism and Christianity. When one practices the life and teachings of the Buddha or of Jesus, one enters the presence of the living Buddha and the living Christ. Both figures represent not remote ideals but living realities encountered through practice. What matters is touching this reality and embodying it in life (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, pp. 21, 37).

This idea also extends to daily life. Thich Nhat Hanh writes that "mindfulness must be practiced throughout the day" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, p. 174). He interprets monastic life not as withdrawal from the world, but as continuous mindfulness in ordinary activities, such as putting on a robe, washing a bowl, walking, or splitting wood. In this sense, practice is not limited to meditation or doctrine; it is embodied in concrete acts of daily life.

During the Vietnam War, this understanding became the basis of Engaged Buddhism. Monks and nuns practiced mindfulness while caring for refugees, orphans, and the wounded. When bombs were falling, it was impossible simply to sit in meditation. Instead, meditation was carried into every act of service. To help the sick was to serve a Buddha or a bodhisattva. Thus, practice became both daily mindfulness and concrete compassion in the midst of social suffering (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, pp. 168–169, 173–176).

At the same time, the meaning of "practice" needs further clarification. In English, the term is broad. In the Vietnamese and Buddhist contexts, it may be related to words such as thực tập, thực hành, tu tập, hành trì, and Đạo Bụt Dấn Thân. This linguistic and doctrinal background remains an important task for future research.

Practice During the Vietnam War

To understand why practice became central for Thich Nhat Hanh, it is important to look at the Vietnam War context. Society was marked by massive suffering for peasants. In this situation, religion functioned as one of the few remaining moral forces. A key text from this period is Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire, his first major work written in English. It offers a sober analysis

of Vietnamese society and proposes concrete responses to violence and social breakdown. It is in this context that Engaged Buddhism emerges—not as a theoretical idea, but as a practical necessity for peace.

In his open letter In Search of the Enemy of Man (June 1, 1965), addressed to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Thich Nhat Hanh sought to clarify Buddhist perspectives on the self-immolations by Vietnamese monks, which had shocked Western audiences. He explained that while self-destruction is considered a grave crime in Buddhism, the monks who burned themselves were neither hopeless nor despairing. Rather, they acted out of courage and compassion, aspiring to call attention to the suffering of the Vietnamese people. Drawing on the Jataka tale of the Buddha offering himself to a starving lioness, he interpreted the acts as expressions of the highest form of compassion.

> I believe with all my heart that the monks who burned themselves did not aim at the death of the oppressors but only at a change in their policy. Their enemies are not man. They are intolerance, fanaticism, dictatorship, cupidity, hatred and discrimination which lie within the heart of man. I also believe with all my being that the struggle for equality and freedom you lead in Birmingham, Alabama… is not aimed at the whites but only at intolerance, hatred and discrimination. These are real enemies of man — not man himself. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1965)

Nhat Hanh then appealed directly to King, insisting that one engaged in the struggle for equality and human rights could not remain silent before the suffering of Vietnam. To reinforce this plea, he cited prominent Christian voices. He invoked Karl Barth's expression "God in action," as well as Albert Schweitzer's teaching of reverence for life and Paul Tillich's emphasis on the courage to be. By recalling these Christian exemplars, Nhat Hanh sought to situate his Buddhist appeal for peace within a shared ethical and spiritual horizon, urging King to join in raising his voice against the war. His appeal to King reflects his sincere devotion to peace and relief activities in Vietnam, expressed by the concept of "engaged Buddhism." This concept demonstrates his reformist character and also embraces his interreligious perspective (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1967, pp. 102–103).

Nhat Hanh claimed peace on the basis of a serious analysis of the situation of Vietnamese peasants. Most villagers, whether Buddhist or Catholic, suffered directly from bombs and battles and were primarily concerned that the war should end, rather than taking sides with either the Saigon government or the communist Front. According to his analysis, almost none supported the Saigon regime, and only a minority supported the Front, seeing it mainly as an alternative to the U.S.–South Vietnamese alliance (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1967, pp. 102–103).

On this basis, Nhat Hanh emphasized that peace required a non-Communist democratic force, independent of power blocs, where liberties and freedoms were respected and where Communists and non-Communists could cooperate to build a progressive society. Central to this vision was religious cooperation. Buddhists were willing to work with other groups—Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and especially Catholics—for peace and reconstruction. Although Catholic leaders in the cities often displayed strong anti-Communist sentiment, younger priests and laymen, like younger Buddhists, sought solutions in peace and social reconstruction rather than in military confrontation. When Catholic priests publicly raised their voices for peace, it strengthened Buddhist confidence in the possibility of cooperation (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1967, pp. 87, 93).

At the same time, Nhat Hanh stressed that in a war-torn and divided Vietnam, religion was the only institution left that could inspire unity and social responsibility. Since official religious hierarchies were often reluctant to act, he and his companions resolved to rely on their own resources and to work directly among the people. For him, the essence of Engaged Buddhism was not to remain isolated in the monastery, but to practice Buddhism's essence among those who were suffering—to embody Zen in the act of helping. In making this claim, he consciously became confident in advancing it within a Buddhist framework, in relation to Christian theology, yet not dependent on it. Just as Christianity emphasizes active witness in the world, Nhat Hanh proposed a Buddhist path that enters society as a force for relief and renewal.

> Vietnam has become divided. The war has destroyed trust, hope, and all the constructive efforts of the past. People are suspicious of every act of goodwill and every promise made. Religion is the only institution left that can inspire unity and social responsibility. We must use the resources of our spiritual traditions to bring about great change. Buddhism has much to contribute to this work, but we cannot wait for the religious hierarchy to act. They are reluctant to bring about change, and they've repeatedly rejected our efforts to create an engaged Buddhism. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2020, p. 137)

Thus, Nhat Hanh articulated a peace perspective that did not align with either North or South but was grounded in interreligious cooperation and in the socially engaged practice of Buddhism. In his view, Buddhism's task was to step into society for the sake of reconstruction and reconciliation, uniting spiritual practice with concrete action in the midst of human suffering. In the wartime context, practice took concrete social form. It meant relief work, education, medical aid, reconstruction, peace activism, and interreligious cooperation.

Practice as a Method of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Living Buddha, Living Christ, and the Holy Spirit

After the Vietnam War, Thich Nhat Hanh was unable to return to Vietnam and entered a long period of exile. In France, he continued peace work for Vietnamese people, including refugees, while also developing new places of practice such as the Sweet Potatoes meditation center and, later, Plum Village. His activity therefore did not simply move from war to peace. Rather, it seems to have shifted from emergency-oriented social engagement toward community life, refugee support, mindfulness, and daily practice.

This historical transition still requires further research. However, it is important for understanding his later writings on Christianity. His later Buddhist-Christian reflections should not be read as a sudden departure from social engagement. They can be read, at least provisionally, as an extension of the same practical orientation: religion becomes real when it is embodied in daily life and practiced in response to suffering.

Nhat Hanh's later reflections on Christianity were expressed more systematically in *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, first published in 1995 and cited here in the 2007 twentieth-anniversary edition. This work should be read in continuity with his earlier wartime practice and his later community life in exile. It was not a sudden shift in his thought, but a theoretical articulation of decades of practice.

In *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, Nhat Hanh identifies a common ground between Buddhism and Christianity in the Holy Spirit and practice, even though the two traditions remain distinct.

He interprets the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus as the sign that Jesus was already "in touch with the reality of life," the source of mindfulness, wisdom, and understanding. In parallel, he recalls that when the Buddha sat beneath the Bodhi tree, the holy seeds within him blossomed forth. Both Jesus and the Buddha were human, yet each became an expression of the highest spirit of humanity. In this perspective, the Holy Spirit is not treated mainly as an abstract metaphysical doctrine. Rather, Nhat Hanh understands it as a lived and transformative reality connected with understanding, love, mindfulness, and compassion. This interpretation allows him to read Jesus and the Buddha not as remote objects of belief, but as living realities encountered through practice.

Nhat Hanh emphasizes that authentic fidelity to Jesus or the Buddha lies in practice rather than abstract ideas. To honor Jesus is to live deeply, to love, and to act with charity. True teaching is not static or reducible to words; it is the reality of life. Doctrines or concepts without this grounding remain disconnected from real life. From this perspective, he highlights a fundamental convergence between Buddhism and Christianity. When one practices the life and teachings of the Buddha or of Jesus, one enters the presence of the living Buddha and the living Christ. Both figures represent not remote ideals but living realities encountered through practice. What matters is touching this reality and embodying it in life (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, pp. 21, 37).

For Nhat Hanh, Buddhist-Christian dialogue is therefore not primarily a comparison of doctrines. It is a shared return to living practice. The living Buddha, the living Christ, and the Holy Spirit become meaningful where compassion, mindfulness, love, and understanding are embodied in daily life. This point also connects with his understanding of Engaged Buddhism. In the midst of war, contemplation and action could not be separated. Nhat Hanh proposed Engaged Buddhism as a way to preserve contemplative depth while helping others. For him, contemplation and engagement do not exclude one another; rather, they belong together in the practice of real life (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, pp. 56, 60–61).

Both Buddhism and Christianity point to the same task: to go beyond accumulated concepts and return to the original sources—back to the living Buddha and the living Christ. What matters is not the preservation of doctrinal systems but the recovery of direct experience of reality (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, pp. 154, 167). For Nhat Hanh, the true body of Jesus is his teaching. Christ is most present not in abstract dogma but in the lived practice of his message. Whenever and wherever his teaching is enacted, the living Christ manifests itself. In this way, both Christianity and Buddhism converge in pointing to a reality that transcends conceptual forms, a reality accessible only through practice (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007, p. 194).

Thus, Living Buddha, Living Christ shows how Nhat Hanh's concept of practice became a method of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Religion is not realized only in doctrine, institution, or belief. It becomes real when the teachings of the Buddha or Jesus are embodied in life. This is why practice functions as the bridge between Engaged Buddhism, mindfulness, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue, although this non-doctrinal reading of Jesus does not fit neatly within traditional Christian theology. In this sense, wartime relief practice and daily mindfulness practice are not separate themes, but different forms of the same practical orientation.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated Nhat Hanh's concept of practice by reviewing both his historical path and his central concepts. In conclusion, practice can be understood as a central concept

that connects Thich Nhat Hanh's wartime Engaged Buddhism, postwar mindfulness, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue. His originality lies in maintaining both the social and spiritual dimensions of practice. Through this concept, religion becomes not only a doctrine to be believed, but a way of living, responding to suffering, and encountering others.

Several tasks remain for future research. It will be necessary to examine the historical development of his exile period and refugee support more carefully, to clarify the Vietnamese and Buddhist terms corresponding to "practice," and to situate his understanding of the Holy Spirit more precisely in relation to Christian theology and twentieth-century interreligious dialogue.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported by the JICA VJU Research Grant Program 2024.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly and ChatGPT were used as AI-assisted tools during the writing process of this manuscript. Grammarly was used for proofreading and refining the language of the manuscript. ChatGPT was used for English-language editing, translation support, and rephrasing statements to improve accuracy, clarity, coherence, and readability. The use of these tools was limited to improving the language and readability of the manuscript. The author further declares that these tools were not used to generate the research topic, research design, selection and interpretation of sources, arguments, analyses, discussion, or conclusions. All AI-assisted language suggestions were carefully reviewed, revised, and verified by the author. The ideas, design, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from the author's own sustained research and scholarly judgment. The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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Integrating Virtual Production and MetaHuman Creator Into University Curriculum

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper presents an overview of a specialised segment of the course Engineering Animation and Other Media, we teach at the Faculty of Technical Sciences. Our focus is on integrating multimedia techniques through the Unreal Engine workflow and the MetaHuman Character Creator. The primary aim of this study is to evaluate student proficiency in digital cinematography using these tools. In the curriculum, Unreal Engine serves as a central platform for developing skills in virtual cinematography and mixed-media production. Students are tasked with recreating reference-based compositions, which are assessed based on specific technical criteria: focal length accuracy, framing, depth of field, lighting consistency, and character posing. By replicating still-image references in a game-engine environment, they learn to apply visual communication principles to virtual marketing and cinematography. Learning about synthetic human applications in marketing and creative industries prepares our students for future trends in digitalisation and virtual production. We provide an interactive and creative educational environment by combining classical principles with digital tools. The final results are validated through a structured assessment methodology; the resulting industry-level projects are presented alongside a student progress comparison chart included in this paper.

Keywords: metahumans, university curriculum, virtual cinematography, multimedia

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Introduction

Virtual production has become one of the most significant developments in contemporary audiovisual and multimedia production, reshaping the relationship between filmmaking, computer graphics, real-time rendering, and interactive media. By combining game-engine technologies, computer-generated imagery, motion capture, virtual environments, and real-time visualisation, virtual production enables creative and technical decisions to be made earlier and more interactively within the production process. Unlike traditional production pipelines, where many visual elements are developed in later stages of post-production, virtual production allows directors, cinematographers, artists, and technical teams to preview and adjust scenes in real time, creating a closer connection between artistic intention and technical execution (Kadner, 2019; Priadko & Sirenko, 2021).

The increasing use of real-time engines, particularly Unreal Engine, has further expanded the role of virtual production beyond traditional film production. Real-time workflows enable artists and filmmakers to work with lighting, camera movement, art direction, scene composition, and visual effects in a more immediate and interactive way. As described in The Virtual Production Field Guide, Unreal Engine not only supports previs or mechanical planning but also provides a cinematographic perspective on the scene, allowing creative decisions related to lighting, art direction, and camera work to be tested earlier in the production process (Kadner, 2019). This shift has made virtual production relevant not only for film but also for advertising, game development, cinematic visualisation, simulation, virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive multimedia.

As virtual production workflows become more accessible, the required skill set for students and future digital media professionals is also changing. Contemporary production increasingly demands hybrid knowledge that connects animation, cinematography, lighting, camera parameters, digital character staging, real-time rendering, and interactive 3D environments. Similar concerns have been discussed in recent higher education contexts, where virtual production is examined not only as an industry technology but also as a teaching and curriculum development challenge (Sills-Jones & Bennett, 2026). Recent publications on virtual production education note that while academic programs and training initiatives in this area are expanding rapidly, research on their effectiveness remains limited, particularly regarding long-term learning outcomes, graduate competencies, and comparative pedagogical evaluation (Anes Silveira et al., 2026).

A systematic multivocal review by Anes Silveira, São Mamede, and Santos provides a broader overview of how virtual production is currently taught internationally. The authors analysed 115 English-language sources and 55 curricula from 49 higher education institutions, showing that virtual production education commonly emphasises real-time workflows, three-dimensional content creation, immersive technologies, motion capture, digital storytelling, and game-engine-based production. The review also identifies gaps in the systematic assessment of curricular effectiveness and points to the need for stronger evidence on pedagogical approaches and learning outcomes (Anes Silveira et al., 2026).

Goals and Methodology

The aim of this research is to present the Engineering Animation and Other Media Course in the Engineering Animation study programme at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, Serbia. For the first time in this course, students of Animation and Engineering

encounter digital humans, MetaHumans. The course has been part of the curriculum since 2020 and is constantly evolving to keep up to date with industry requirements and trends in multimedia and animation. Within this broader context, this paper presents the integration of virtual production workflows and MetaHuman Creator into the course Engineering Animation and Other Media, which is part of the Animation in Engineering study programme at the University of Novi Sad. According to the official course description, the course aims to train students to recognise the possibilities of connecting computer animation with related media, including sound, video/film, multimedia, the internet, and virtual reality (Faculty of Technical Sciences, n.d.). Since contemporary production pipelines are continuously evolving, the course assignments have been regularly updated in order to remain aligned with current technological developments and industry standards.

Unreal Engine was introduced as a core component of the course in 2020 and incorporated into student projects and production workflows. In response to the rapid development of virtual production technologies and evolving industry demands, the course was further adapted two years ago to include MetaHuman Creator, digital human creation, and character-driven real-time production workflows. The central objective of these adaptations is to introduce students to emerging professional practices in the creative industries and support the development of relevant technical and artistic competencies.

Virtual Production and Digital Humans in Education

The task is structured so that students apply the knowledge gained in exercises and lectures on practical examples. The main task is to position the MetaHuman character into an appropriate pose and recreate the overall composition of the original reference. Using virtual production tools in Unreal Engine and MetaHumans, students recreate three still picture references.

Assignment Design and Virtual Production Workflow

The practical assignment was designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of virtual production by recreating reference images in Unreal Engine using MetaHuman characters. Each student was tasked with recreating three different reference scenes, requiring careful observation and analysis of the original images before translating them into a real-time digital environment.

To achieve a convincing recreation, students had to address multiple aspects of scene construction, including character posing, spatial positioning, camera setup, framing, focal length, focus distance, depth of field, and lighting characteristics such as direction, intensity, colour, and overall atmosphere. The assignment encouraged students to examine how these elements interact to create a specific visual impression.

By combining visual analysis with practical implementation, the task served as a bridge between artistic interpretation and technical execution. Students were required not only to reproduce the appearance of the reference images, but also to understand the underlying cinematic and compositional principles that shaped them and apply this knowledge within a real-time production workflow.

Assignment Overview

The workflow began with the selection and analysis of reference images. Students examined the visual structure of each reference, including the position of the human figure, camera angle, framing, lighting direction, contrast, shadows, and overall atmosphere. This initial analysis served as the foundation for recreating the scene inside Unreal Engine.

After analysing the reference, students developed the scene through three main stages: MetaHuman character staging, camera setup, and lighting setup. Although these stages are presented separately, they were closely interconnected during the production process. Changes in character pose influenced framing, camera parameters affected perceived body proportions, and lighting adjustments altered the readability and atmosphere of the final composition.

MetaHuman Character Staging

The entire project was developed in Unreal Engine using MetaHuman Creator and MetaHuman characters. One of the main reasons for selecting MetaHumans for this assignment was their fully prepared rigging and skinning system, which allowed students to focus on scene reconstruction, character posing, and visual analysis rather than spending time creating and rigging a character from scratch. Students used the MetaHuman Control Rig and Animation mode within Unreal Engine to position the character according to the reference image. The task required careful adjustment of body posture, limb placement, and overall character orientation while maintaining anatomically plausible poses. Particular attention was given to avoiding mesh intersections, geometry penetration, unnatural deformations, and unstable body positions that could reduce the realism of the final result. This approach is consistent with contemporary MetaHuman-based production workflows, in which ready-to-use digital humans, rigging systems, and animation tools support character-driven real-time production (Rossney, 2022; Venter & Ogterop, 2022). This part of the assignment developed spatial awareness and an understanding of digital human staging. Students learned how subtle changes in body position, gesture, silhouette, and character orientation can significantly influence the visual accuracy and overall composition of a scene. After the MetaHuman character had been positioned, students proceeded with camera setup.

Camera and Lighting Setup

After the initial MetaHuman character staging had been established, a cinematic camera was introduced into the scene. From that point onward, camera setup and character adjustments were developed in parallel, as both processes directly influenced the final visual appearance of the reconstruction. Students worked with Unreal Engine's cinematic camera system, which simulates parameters of real-world film cameras. This camera and lighting workflow followed contemporary Unreal Engine cinematic production practices, in which cinematic cameras, real-time lighting, and scene composition are adjusted interactively to achieve the desired visual result (Venter & Ogterop, 2022). While refining the character's pose and position, they simultaneously analysed and adjusted sensor size, focal length, aperture, focus distance, depth of field, camera angle, and framing in order to recreate the reference image as accurately as possible. This part of the assignment helped students understand the engineering and visual logic behind cinematic camera parameters. Rather than treating the camera as a simple viewport, they learned how camera settings influence perspective, composition, scale, focus, and the overall visual impression of a scene. At the same time, they

observed how changes in character positioning affected framing and how camera adjustments altered the perceived proportions and spatial relationships within the scene.

Once the character staging and camera setup had been established, students proceeded to the lighting stage. They analysed the reference image in terms of light direction, intensity, colour, contrast, shadows, and atmosphere, and then attempted to recreate these lighting conditions inside Unreal Engine.

Lighting represented the final major stage of the workflow because it connected the technical setup with visual interpretation. Students had to understand not only where to place lights, but also how light affects mood, composition, readability of the character, and similarity to the original reference. Compared to camera setup and character staging, lighting required a more complex interpretation of visual information, since several technical parameters had to be adjusted simultaneously in order to achieve a convincing result.

Evaluation Methodology

This section describes the methodology used to evaluate student work and determine the level of understanding achieved through the assignment. A total of 66 students participated in the project over a two-year period, with each student recreating three reference scenes using MetaHuman characters and Unreal Engine. Student performance was assessed using a four-level grading scale ranging from 0 to 3 points, where 3 points indicated excellent understanding and mastery of the material, 2 points indicated solid understanding, 1 point reflected familiarity with the concepts and partial achievement of the learning outcomes, and 0 points indicated that the material had not been successfully mastered.

The evaluation was based on several technical criteria that reflected the core learning objectives of the assignment: MetaHuman pose accuracy, camera framing and composition, focal length adjustment, focus setup, and lighting recreation. Although these categories are closely interconnected within the virtual cinematography workflow, they were assessed separately in order to distinguish specific technical competencies.

MetaHuman pose accuracy evaluated how closely the digital character matched the posture and spatial positioning visible in the reference image. In addition to visual similarity, particular attention was given to the technical correctness of the pose. Characters were expected to maintain anatomically plausible body positions without appearing unnaturally bent or broken, while mesh intersections and geometry penetrations between body parts or clothing elements were considered indicators of incorrect character staging.

Camera framing and composition focused on the student's ability to reproduce the original shot structure. This criterion included the correct placement of the virtual camera, appropriate camera angle, and accurate framing of the character within the image. Students were also required to select a suitable camera sensor configuration, as sensor size directly influences the resulting composition and perspective. A successful recreation required the character to occupy a position within the frame that closely corresponded to the reference image.

Focal length adjustment was evaluated independently from framing because perspective distortion can significantly alter the perceived proportions of the character. To determine whether the focal length had been correctly selected, evaluators compared the relative proportions of body parts that should maintain consistent visual relationships, such as the size

of the hand relative to the head or the foot relative to the forearm. Significant deviations from these expected proportions indicated that the focal length was either too short or too long. Since pose accuracy, framing, and focal length strongly influence one another, clear assessment boundaries were established to ensure that each criterion measured a distinct aspect of the reconstruction process.

The focus setup assessed the student's understanding of aperture and focus settings within Unreal Engine's cinematic camera system. A successful result required the primary subject to be clearly in focus while maintaining an appropriate depth-of-field effect consistent with the reference image. Images in which the character was not properly focused, or where the entire scene remained uniformly sharp despite the visual characteristics of the reference, received lower scores.

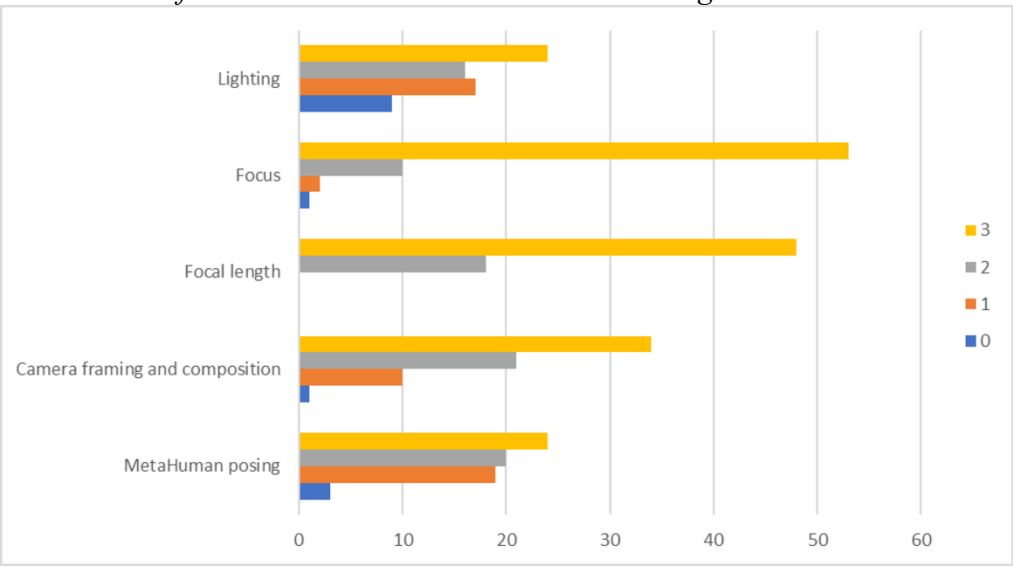
Lighting recreation represented a single evaluation category but incorporated several technical components. Students were required to accurately reproduce the spatial placement of light sources, their colour characteristics, and their intensity. Assessment, therefore, focused on whether the lighting setup recreated the direction of illumination, the colour temperature and visual appearance of the light, and the overall brightness levels observed in the reference image. Although lighting contributes significantly to the final visual impression, the evaluation emphasised the technical accuracy of the lighting configuration rather than subjective artistic interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The evaluation results indicate that students achieved the strongest performance in focus setup and focal length adjustment. As shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, these two categories contain the highest number of students who achieved the maximum score of 3 points, with only a small number of lower scores. This suggests that students adapted well to the technical aspects of virtual cinematography once camera parameters were explained and applied through practical examples.

Figure 1

Distribution of Student Scores Across Evaluation Categories



Note. Scores range from 0 to 3, where 0 indicates that the material was not successfully mastered and 3 indicates excellent understanding and mastery of the material. Values represent the number of students in each score category.

Table 1
Distribution of Student Scores by Evaluation Category

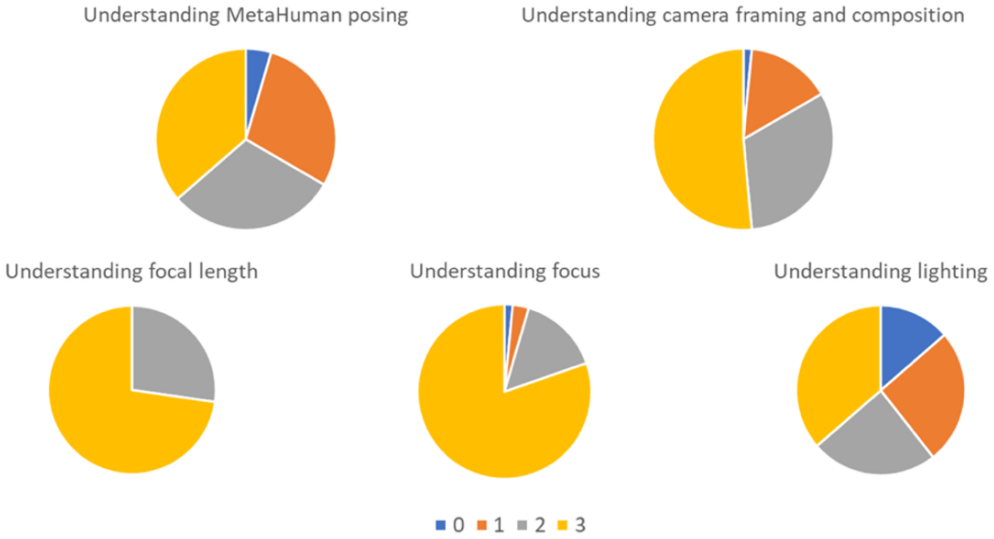
Score	MetaHuman Posing	Camera Framing and Composition	Focal Length	Focus	Lighting
3 - Excellent understanding and mastery	24	34	48	53	24
2 - Solid understanding	20	21	18	10	16
1 - Basic familiarity	19	10	0	2	17
0 - Not successfully mastered	3	1	0	1	9

Strong results were also achieved in camera framing and composition, as well as in MetaHuman posing. Although these categories showed a slightly wider distribution of scores than focus and focal length, the majority of students still achieved high results. This indicates that most students were able to understand the relationship between character placement, spatial composition, shot construction, and the position of the digital human within the virtual scene.

Lighting reconstruction showed the greatest variation in student performance. In contrast to the camera-related categories, the lighting results were more evenly distributed across all score levels, including a noticeably higher number of lower scores. This suggests that lighting was the most challenging aspect of the assignment for beginner students. Unlike focus or focal length, which can be adjusted through relatively direct technical parameters, lighting requires a simultaneous understanding of light direction, intensity, colour, shadow, contrast, atmosphere, and visual interpretation.

The individual score distributions presented in Figure 2 further support this observation. While focus and focal length are dominated by the highest score category, lighting shows a more balanced distribution between scores 0, 1, 2, and 3. This indicates that students were generally more successful in mastering camera-related technical parameters than in reconstructing complex lighting conditions. Therefore, future iterations of the assignment should place additional emphasis on lighting analysis, including practical exercises focused on identifying light sources, recreating shadow direction, adjusting colour temperature, and balancing light intensity within the scene.

Figure 2
Individual Score Distributions by Evaluation Category



Note. Each pie chart shows the percentage distribution of student scores within one evaluation category. Scores range from 0 to 3, where higher scores indicate a higher level of mastery.

Student Work Examples

In addition to the quantitative evaluation, selected examples of student work are presented in Figures 3–5. Each figure includes the original reference image alongside the corresponding student recreation created in Unreal Engine using MetaHuman characters. These examples demonstrate the students' ability to analyse visual references and reproduce key elements such as camera perspective, focal length, depth of field, character pose, composition, and lighting conditions. The showcased works illustrate different levels of achievement, providing insight into both successful solutions and common challenges encountered during the assignment.

Figure 3
Selected Examples of Student Recreations and Reference Images After the Course, Student Anja Bojić



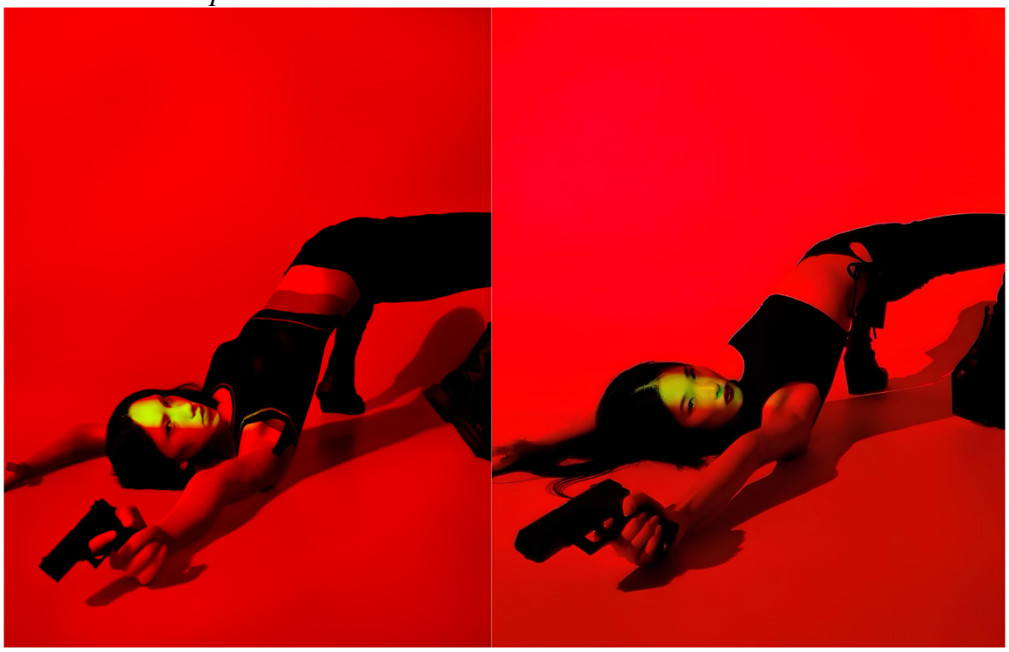
Source: Left: student recreation created in Unreal Engine using a MetaHuman character, by student Anja Bojić. Right: original reference image retrieved from Pinterest, https://in.pinterest.com/pin/674484481730595756/

Figure 4
Selected Examples of Student Recreations and Reference Images After the Course, Student Lazar Pejak



Source: Left: student recreation created in Unreal Engine using a MetaHuman character, by student Lazar Pejak. Right: original reference image retrieved from Pinterest, https://fr.pinterest.com/pin/464222674113813986/

Figure 5
Selected Examples of Student Recreations and Reference Images After the Course, Student Nina Popović



Source: Left: student recreation created in Unreal Engine using a MetaHuman character, by student Nina Popović. Right: original reference image retrieved from Pinterest, https://www.pinterest.com/pin/798263102751552804/

The presented examples complement the statistical analysis by providing a visual representation of student performance. While numerical results indicate overall achievement across evaluation categories, the recreated scenes reveal how students applied theoretical

knowledge and technical skills in practice. The comparison between reference images and student recreations highlights the extent to which students were able to interpret visual information, make informed production decisions, and translate their observations into a real-time virtual environment.

Taken together, the quantitative results and visual examples suggest that the assignment successfully connected technical and artistic learning outcomes. Students were not only introduced to Unreal Engine and MetaHuman Creator as software tools, but also to a production-oriented way of thinking that involves analysing references, reconstructing visual systems, solving technical challenges, and making creative decisions within a real-time workflow. As such, the assignment demonstrates how virtual production exercises can support the development of both technical competencies and visual literacy in computer graphics education.

Conclusion

This paper presented the integration of virtual production workflows and MetaHuman Creator into the course Engineering Animation and Other Media at the University of Novi Sad. The main objective was to examine how industry-relevant tools, such as Unreal Engine and MetaHuman characters, can be used in higher education to support the development of students' technical and artistic competencies in computer graphics, engineering animation, and virtual cinematography.

The assignment was designed around the recreation of reference images in a real-time production environment. Through this process, students were required to analyse visual references and translate them into Unreal Engine scenes by adjusting character pose, spatial positioning, camera framing, focal length, focus, depth of field, and lighting. In this way, the assignment connected theoretical knowledge with practical implementation and encouraged students to understand the relationship between visual analysis, technical parameters, and cinematic composition.

The evaluation results showed that students achieved the strongest performance in focus setup and focal length adjustment, suggesting that they were able to understand and apply camera-related parameters successfully after practical instruction. Strong outcomes were also observed in camera framing, composition, and MetaHuman posing, indicating that most students developed a solid understanding of spatial placement, digital human staging, and shot construction. Lighting reconstruction, however, showed the greatest variation in results and proved to be the most challenging aspect of the assignment. This indicates that lighting requires additional pedagogical attention, as it involves the simultaneous interpretation of direction, intensity, colour, contrast, shadows, atmosphere, and visual meaning.

Overall, the results suggest that the integration of MetaHuman Creator and virtual production workflows into the curriculum can support the development of both technical competencies and visual literacy. Students were not only introduced to contemporary software tools, but also to a production-oriented way of thinking that includes reference analysis, scene reconstruction, problem solving, and creative decision-making within a real-time digital environment.

The study also points to several directions for future development. Future iterations of the course may include more focused lighting exercises, animation-based assignments, facial

animation, motion capture, and more advanced virtual production workflows. Expanding the assignment in these directions would allow students to engage more deeply with contemporary production practices and further strengthen the connection between academic education and the professional demands of the multimedia, film, gaming, and creative industries.

Acknowledgments

Writing of this paper was supported by Department of Fundamental Sciences and the project Artificial intelligence and its application possibilities in improving the teaching process in fundamental disciplines.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors acknowledge the use of Grammarly for proofreading and minor language refinement. The tool was used only to improve grammar, clarity, and readability. All content, structure, methodology, analysis, results, and conclusions were developed, reviewed, and verified by the authors.

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Navigating Timbre: Locomotion as Epistemic Practice in Immersive Acoustic Environments

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Contemporary audio visualization technologies predominantly reduce sound to amplitude-based representations, obscuring the multidimensional complexity of timbre. This paper examines "Inside Sound," a room-scale virtual reality installation that transforms spectral audio analysis into navigable three-dimensional space, proposing that physical locomotion through acoustic data constitutes a distinct mode of sonic knowledge. Drawing on Gibson's ecological approach to perception and theories of embodied cognition (Clark, 1997; Varela et al., 1991), this work argues that walking through constellations of spectral features (Spectral Centroid, Flux, and Spread) reconfigures the epistemological relationship between listener and sound object. Rather than passive audition, participants engage in what we term "navigational listening," where the body becomes an instrument of timbral analysis. This paper investigates how the transposition of typically invisible acoustic properties into spatial affordances challenges conventional distinctions between listening and looking, creating what we characterize as an "inverted synesthesia." The analysis reveals implications for sound studies, immersive experience design, and accessibility, arguing that spatial navigation offers cognitive access to sonic dimensions otherwise restricted to computational or expert musical listening.

Keywords: embodied cognition, timbre, virtual reality, ecological perception, navigational epistemology, sound studies

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Introduction

The history of representing sound visually is marked by a progressive reduction of acoustic complexity. From oscilloscopes to contemporary digital audio workstations, visualization paradigms have consistently privileged amplitude, the loudness of sound, over timbre, the multidimensional quality that distinguishes a flute from a violin playing the same pitch. This reductive tendency reflects both technical constraints and perceptual assumptions: amplitude maps cleanly onto visual intensity, while timbre's spectral complexity resists straightforward graphic translation.

Yet timbre constitutes what acoustician John Grey described as the "primary vehicle of musical expression" (Grey, 1977), encoding information about sound sources, production mechanisms, and acoustic environments. When we recognize a friend's voice or identify an approaching vehicle by engine sound, we rely on timbral discrimination. Computational audio analysis has developed methods for quantifying timbral features, including Spectral Centroid (brightness), Spectral Flux (rate of change), and Spectral Spread (frequency distribution), yet these remain largely inaccessible to non-expert listeners except through specialized visualization interfaces that demand trained interpretation.

"Inside Sound" proposes an alternative: making spectral analysis physically navigable. Rather than viewing timbral data as graphs or spectrograms, participants walk through room-scale virtual environments where each point in three-dimensional space represents a moment in time analyzed through computational timbral metrics. This design raises a direct question: does physical locomotion through acoustic data constitute a mode of knowledge distinct from both passive listening and visual analysis?

Figure 1

Conceptual Visualization of Timbral Space as Navigable Particle Constellation



Note. Each luminous point represents a moment in time analyzed through spectral features, creating an acoustic constellation that participants can physically explore.

This paper argues that it does. Drawing on James Gibson's ecological approach to perception (Gibson, 1979) and contemporary theories of embodied cognition (Clark, 1997; Varela et al., 1991), we propose that navigational engagement with spectral data creates what we term an

"epistemic affordance structure," a configuration where knowledge emerges through bodily movement rather than contemplative observation. In doing so, the installation inverts the conventional synesthetic relationship: instead of "seeing sounds," participants "navigate timbre," transforming invisible acoustic properties into spatial features that solicit bodily exploration.

The analysis proceeds in four movements. First, we situate the work within existing approaches to audio visualization and immersive sound art, identifying the gap between computational audio analysis and embodied sonic experience. Second, we develop a theoretical framework for understanding navigation as an epistemic practice, drawing on ecological perception and phenomenology. Third, we examine how "Inside Sound" instantiates this framework through specific design choices regarding spatial mapping, gestural interaction, and temporal navigation. Finally, we consider broader implications for sound studies, accessibility, and the design of immersive cognitive environments.

From Visualization to Navigation: Rethinking Audio Representation

The Amplitude Paradigm and Its Limits

Audio visualization technologies have evolved since their origins in analog oscilloscopes, yet they remain largely bound to what we might call the "amplitude paradigm." Whether in professional audio software like Pro Tools or consumer applications like Spotify's visualizers, the dominant approach maps sound amplitude onto visual intensity, brightness, or geometric scale. This design choice reflects both the historical development of audio technology, where volume control was the primary manipulation affordance, and perceptual assumptions about cross-modal correspondence between loudness and brightness.

Psychoacoustic research demonstrates, however, that amplitude represents only one dimension of auditory experience. Timbre, variously defined as the quality that distinguishes sounds of equal loudness and pitch, encompasses spectral envelope, temporal evolution, and harmonic structure (McAdams & Bigand, 1993). These properties carry precise information: a saxophone's "breathy" quality derives from noise in its spectral profile; a piano's percussive attack creates its characteristic temporal envelope; a violin's vibrato manifests as periodic frequency modulation. Reducing these multidimensional phenomena to amplitude visualization is akin to representing a painting solely through its average brightness.

Contemporary audio analysis software has developed visualization techniques for spectral content: spectrograms, Mel-frequency cepstral coefficients (MFCCs), and wavelet transforms. Yet these representations demand specialized training to interpret. A spectrogram's vertical axis represents frequency, its horizontal axis time, and color intensity typically indicates amplitude at specific frequency bands. Reading this representation requires translating visual patterns into sonic meanings: horizontal lines indicate sustained tones, vertical strikes suggest percussive attacks, and diagonal sweeps represent glissandi. This translation is learned, not immediate, accessible primarily to sound engineers and researchers.

Immersive Sound Art and Spatial Audio

Parallel developments in sound art have explored spatial approaches to sonic experience, though typically emphasizing acoustic space rather than timbral space. Works like Janet Cardiff's "The Forty Part Motet" (2001) or Ryoji Ikeda's "data.tron" series create immersive

environments where listeners navigate through distributed sound sources. These installations demonstrate that physical movement can alter sonic experience, not merely by changing the mix of sounds one hears, but by creating what Brandon LaBelle terms “acoustic territories” (LaBelle, 2006) that invite active exploration rather than passive reception.

Such works, however, generally maintain a conventional relationship between physical space and sonic space: sounds emanate from specific locations, and moving changes what one hears through proximity and acoustic propagation. “Inside Sound” proposes something different: the space itself represents timbral properties rather than source locations. Each coordinate in the virtual environment corresponds not to where a sound is produced but to what that sound is, its spectral character at a specific moment in time.

This shift has precedent in data sonification and visualization practices that map abstract data to spatial or sensory dimensions. Works like Rebecca Fiebrink's “Sonic Mapping Project” or Natasha Barrett's “Isostasie” translate environmental or scientific data into sound. Yet these typically maintain a unidirectional flow: data becomes sound, which is then heard. “Inside Sound” proposes bidirectional engagement: spectral analysis generates spatial structure, which participants then navigate, creating a feedback loop between acoustic properties and embodied movement.

The Question of Epistemic Access

This review reveals a gap between two modes of engaging with timbral complexity. On one hand, computational analysis provides precise quantification of spectral features but presents them through representations requiring technical expertise to interpret. On the other hand, immersive sound art creates embodied sonic experiences but typically maintains conventional relationships between space and sound. Neither approach fully addresses how non-expert listeners might develop intuitive, embodied understanding of timbral structure.

The question driving “Inside Sound” is whether physical navigation can bridge this gap, whether walking through spectral data might constitute a form of knowledge that is neither purely analytical nor merely experiential, but rather what philosopher Alva Noë calls “sensorimotor knowledge” (Noë, 2004): understanding grounded in the coordination of perception and action.

Theoretical Framework: Navigation as Epistemic Practice

Gibson's Ecological Approach and Direct Perception

James Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception (Gibson, 1979) provides theoretical grounding for understanding navigation as knowledge production. Gibson challenged the then-dominant view of perception as mental construction from impoverished sensory data, arguing instead that perception is direct: organisms perceive affordances, action possibilities offered by environmental structures, without requiring inferential processing.

A staircase affords climbing to an able-bodied adult but presents an obstacle to a wheelchair user or a crawling infant. This affordance is not a property of the stairs alone nor of the perceiver alone, but of the relationship between the two. Perceiving affordances requires movement: we discover what surfaces afford by exploring them through locomotion and manipulation.

Applied to “Inside Sound,” Gibson's framework suggests that spectral constellations afford specific navigational actions: approaching bright timbres, retreating from harsh ones, circling around unstable spectral flux. These affordances are not symbolic representations requiring interpretation but environmental structures that directly specify action possibilities. The question becomes: what kind of knowledge emerges from exploring such affordances?

Embodied Cognition and Enactive Knowing

Contemporary embodied cognition theory extends Gibson's insights, arguing that cognition itself emerges from sensorimotor engagement rather than preceding it (Clark, 1997; Varela et al., 1991). On this view, knowing is not passive reception of information but active engagement with environmental structures through bodily action. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's concept of “enaction” emphasizes that cognitive structures arise from recurrent sensorimotor patterns, what Lakoff and Johnson term “image schemas” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Consider how we understand containment: not through abstract logical rules but through embodied experiences of being in rooms, putting objects in boxes, seeing liquids in containers. This sensorimotor understanding then structures how we think about abstract domains. We speak of being “in love,” ideas being “in” our heads, or arguments having “content.”

Applied to timbral navigation, this suggests that moving through spectral space might create embodied understanding of timbre's relational structure. Rather than learning that high Spectral Centroid indicates brightness through verbal instruction, participants might develop direct sensorimotor knowledge: approaching points high in the vertical dimension correlates with hearing brighter timbres. This is not symbolic knowledge about timbre but practical knowledge of how timbral variation structures navigable space.

Phenomenology of Spatial Sound

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception offers additional perspective, particularly his analysis of how space is constituted through bodily possibility rather than geometric abstraction (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). For Merleau-Ponty, space is not an empty container awaiting objects but a structured field of potential actions. We experience “up” as the direction from which objects might fall, “near” as within reach, “far” as requiring locomotion.

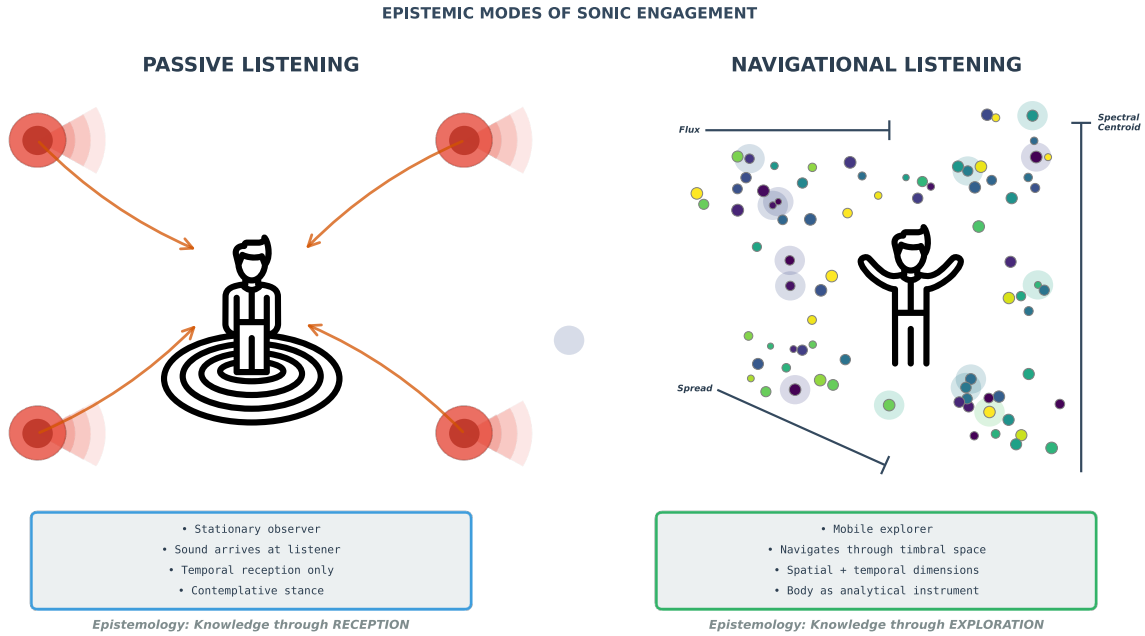
This phenomenological insight becomes salient when considering how “Inside Sound” creates what we might term “timbral spatiality,” a configuration where spectral relationships structure navigational possibilities. High Spectral Centroid is not merely represented as “up” on an arbitrary axis; it becomes literally above, requiring upward navigation. Spectral Flux's rate of change manifests as depth, requiring forward or backward movement. Spectral Spread's distribution appears as breadth, demanding lateral exploration.

This spatialization is not arbitrary mapping but creates what Don Ihde calls a “technological mediation” (Ihde, 1990) that reorganizes perceptual relationships. Just as eyeglasses make the distant near or telescopes bring celestial bodies into viewing range, “Inside Sound” makes invisible spectral properties accessible to bodily navigation. The question is whether this accessibility constitutes genuine epistemic access or merely novel experience.

The Concept of Navigational Listening

Synthesizing these theoretical resources, we propose the concept of "navigational listening," a mode of auditory engagement where sonic knowledge emerges through the coupling of bodily movement and acoustic perception. This differs from conventional listening in four key respects.

Figure 2
Epistemic Modes of Sonic Engagement



Note. Left: passive listening positions the auditor as stationary receiver of sonic information arriving from distributed sources. Right: navigational listening transforms the listener into mobile explorer moving through timbral space structured by spectral features (Centroid, Flux, Spread), where the body becomes an instrument of acoustic analysis.

First, it is inherently active rather than passive. Traditional listening positions the auditor as relatively stationary recipient of sonic information. Navigational listening requires continuous decision-making about where to move next, creating what Shaun Gallagher calls "motor intentionality" (Gallagher, 2005): purposive action that precedes reflective thought.

Second, it is inherently relational. Rather than focusing on individual sounds in isolation, navigational listening reveals how sounds relate to each other through spatial proximity. Timbres that are spectrally similar cluster together; abrupt timbral changes create navigational gaps. This relational structure becomes directly perceptible through movement patterns required to traverse the space.

Third, it creates proprioceptive anchoring for abstract concepts. Spectral Centroid becomes associated with vertical ascent and descent; Spectral Flux with forward and backward motion; Spectral Spread with lateral breadth. These associations are not merely metaphorical but grounded in sensorimotor experience, what cognitive linguists call "experiential basis" for abstract thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Finally, navigational listening enables discovery through exploration. Rather than being told what to notice, participants discover timbral patterns by wandering: encountering bright

clusters, traversing regions of rapid spectral change, or noticing how certain sounds create dense constellations while others produce sparse distributions. This discovery-based learning aligns with constructivist educational theory (Papert, 1980), where understanding emerges from active exploration rather than passive reception.

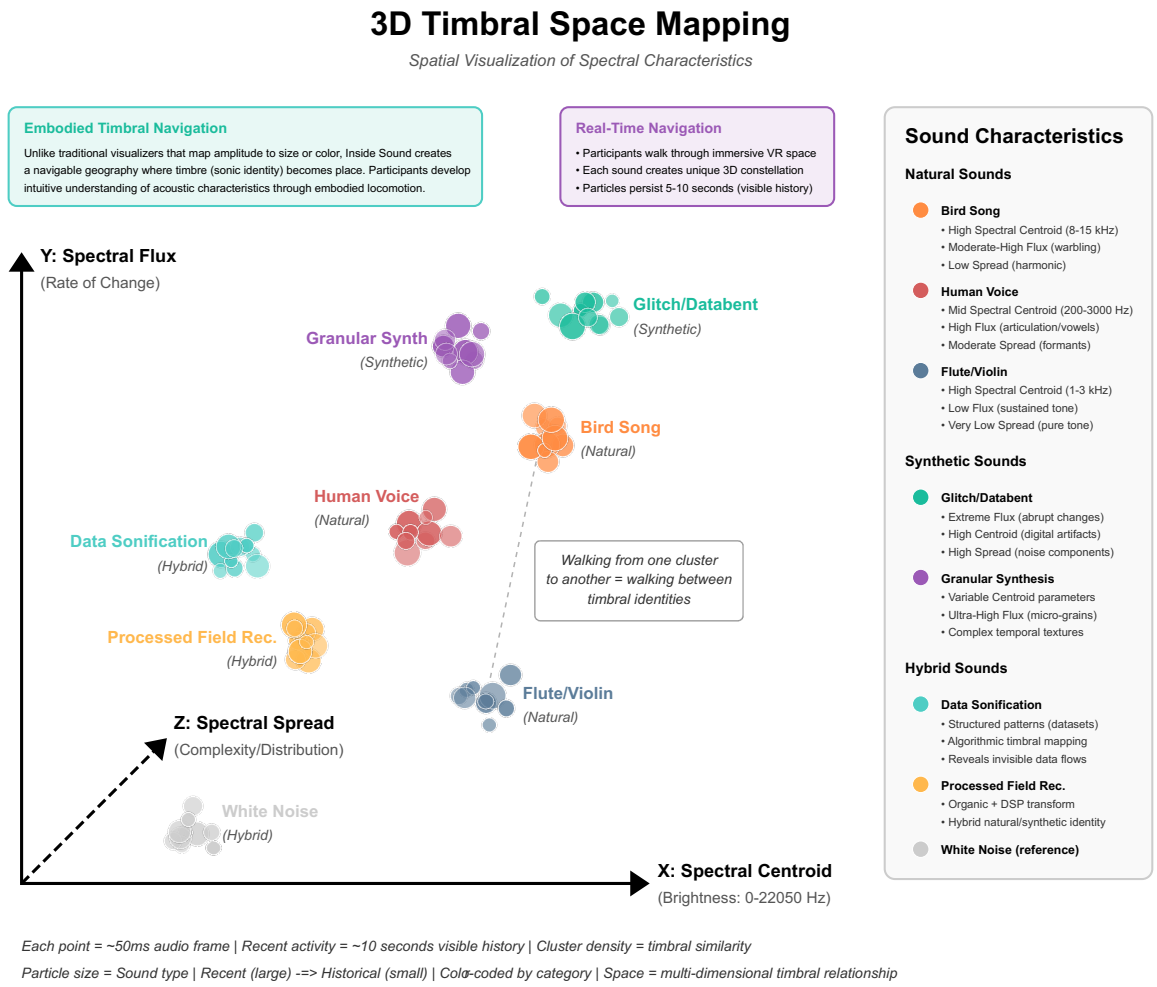
Inside Sound: Instantiating Navigational Epistemology

Spatial Mapping as Epistemic Infrastructure

"Inside Sound" materializes the concept of navigational listening through specific design choices that transform spectral analysis into spatial affordances. The operation maps three dimensions of timbral variation onto three dimensions of navigable space.

The vertical axis (Y) carries Spectral Centroid, the center of mass of the spectrum, commonly understood as brightness. High Centroid values appear elevated, requiring upward navigation; low Centroid values settle toward ground level. The depth axis (Z) carries Spectral Flux, measuring the rate of spectral change between consecutive analysis frames. Rapidly changing timbres recede into depth; stable timbres remain proximate. The lateral axis (X) carries Spectral Spread, quantifying the distribution of spectral energy across frequency bands. Concentrated spectra cluster centrally; diffuse spectra sprawl laterally.

Figure 3
Three-Dimensional Timbral Space Mapping



Note. Spectral characteristics (Centroid, Flux, Spread) create navigable acoustic constellations spanning natural sources (bird song, human voice, acoustic instruments), synthetic textures (glitch/databending, granular synthesis), and hybrid compositions (data sonification, processed field recordings), revealing the expanded timbral palette accessible through navigational engagement.

This mapping is not arbitrary. The vertical dimension exploits what George Lakoff identifies as the "MORE IS UP" conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), grounding the abstract notion of spectral brightness in the concrete experience of elevation. The depth dimension leverages the perceptual principle that moving objects appear to approach or recede, creating intuitive correspondence between spectral change and spatial distance. The lateral dimension utilizes the embodied understanding of spread and concentration: tightly clustered objects versus distributed arrays.

These mappings create what J.J. Gibson termed a "layout," a persistent spatial structure that remains stable across time. While the specific sounds change and new analysis points continuously appear, the relationship between spectral properties and spatial coordinates persists. Bright timbres always appear elevated; rapidly changing sounds always recede. This stability enables participants to develop sensorimotor expectations: approaching an elevated point anticipates encountering brightness; moving forward anticipates confronting spectral change.

Temporal Navigation and the Star-Trail Effect

A key design element addresses the temporal dimension of sound: how to represent the continuous flow of acoustic events in a spatial medium. “Inside Sound” employs what we call the “star-trail effect”: recent analysis points glow brightly and connect through luminous trails, while older points fade into darkness. This creates a visual history of acoustic evolution, similar to long-exposure photography of celestial motion.

This temporal visualization serves three epistemic functions. First, it makes visible the temporal patterns of spectral change: rapid sequences create dense trails, while stable timbres produce sparse, disconnected points. Second, it enables participants to trace spectral evolution backward, discovering how current timbral configurations emerged from previous states. Third, it creates anticipatory structures: trailing patterns suggest probable future trajectories, though the actual unfolding may deviate.

The metaphorical choice of stellar navigation is deliberate. Just as ancient navigators used constellations to orient themselves spatially, participants use spectral constellations to orient themselves timbrally. The night sky becomes a conceptual model for understanding how discrete analysis moments cluster into recognizable patterns, what we might term “timbral constellations.”

Gestural Interaction and Agency

While navigation provides the primary mode of engagement, “Inside Sound” supplements locomotion with hand gestures enabling participants to switch audio sources, manipulate playback time, and select different spectral feature combinations. These interactions establish epistemic agency: the capacity to formulate questions and test hypotheses about timbral structure.

Consider the ability to switch between audio sources drawn from three categories: natural (bird songs, human voice), synthetic (glitch textures, granular synthesis), and hybrid (data sonification, processed field recordings). This enables comparative analysis grounded in bodily movement: participants might discover that bird songs create vertical oscillations (corresponding to pitch modulations in Spectral Centroid) while glitch textures produce chaotic, widely distributed patterns. Such discoveries are not delivered through explanation but emerge from exploratory navigation.

Similarly, temporal manipulation (scrubbing through audio, slowing or accelerating playback) enables hypothesis testing. If a participant notices dense clustering in one region, they can slow time to examine whether this density arises from many similar timbres or rapid repetition of a single timbral type. This transforms navigation from passive observation into active inquiry.

The capacity to reconfigure which spectral features map to which spatial dimensions further enhances epistemic flexibility. By swapping Centroid and Flux mappings, participants can discover whether patterns they attributed to brightness actually arise from spectral change rates. This comparative navigation reveals that timbral structure is not unitary but emerges from the interaction of multiple spectral dimensions.

Inverted Synesthesia: From Seeing Sound to Navigating Timbre

Traditional synesthesia describes experiences where stimulation of one sensory modality triggers automatic perception in another: hearing colors or seeing sounds. Audio visualization technologies create what we might call "artificial synesthesia," deliberately mapping acoustic parameters onto visual dimensions. "Inside Sound" proposes something different: what we term "inverted synesthesia."

Rather than making sounds visible, the installation makes spectral properties navigable. The inversion replaces visual perception with proprioceptive and kinesthetic modalities. Participants do not primarily see timbre; they feel it through the effort of ascent when approaching bright sounds, the bodily rotation required to examine lateral spectral spread, the forward lean into regions of rapid change.

This inversion has implications beyond interface design. Vision operates at a distance, enabling observation without engagement. Proprioception and kinesthesis are inherently involved: one cannot perceive one's own movements without making them. By grounding timbral knowledge in these embodied modalities, "Inside Sound" shifts sonic understanding from observational to participatory.

This approach also addresses accessibility considerations often overlooked in audio visualization. Conventional spectrograms or waveforms serve primarily sighted users with technical training. Navigational engagement potentially opens alternative pathways to timbral understanding for blind and low-vision participants who excel at spatial navigation through auditory and haptic cues. While current VR technology remains predominantly visual, the underlying design principle (making abstract properties navigable rather than merely visible) suggests future implementations through haptic interfaces or auditory depth cues.

Discussion: Implications and Limitations

Epistemological Claims and Challenges

The central claim of this analysis, that navigation constitutes genuine epistemic access to timbral structure, faces important challenges. Skeptics might argue that what appears to be knowledge is merely novel experience: participants enjoy walking through spectral visualizations but do not actually learn about timbre in ways that transfer to conventional listening contexts.

This challenge demands empirical investigation beyond the scope of this theoretical analysis. Three considerations, however, support the stronger epistemological claim. First, educational research on embodied learning demonstrates that sensorimotor engagement can facilitate conceptual understanding (Abrahamson & Lindgren, 2014). Students who physically enact mathematical relationships show improved problem-solving compared to those receiving only symbolic instruction.

Second, research on spatial cognition reveals that navigational knowledge often proves more robust and transferable than declarative knowledge (Meilinger, 2008). We remember routes we have walked better than routes we have read about; we understand building layouts we have explored more deeply than those we have studied through floor plans.

Third, the concept of "instrumental understanding" from musical cognition suggests that bodily engagement with sonic structures can create knowledge distinct from both acoustic analysis and passive listening (Windsor & de Bézenac, 2012). Musicians know musical intervals not merely by hearing them but through the bodily gestures required to produce them. "Inside Sound" proposes that similar instrumental understanding might extend to spectral properties through navigational gestures.

Implications for Sound Studies

This work contributes to sound studies' ongoing interrogation of listening practices and sonic epistemologies. Recent scholarship has examined how different technological mediations, from stethoscopes to sonograms, create distinct modes of sonic knowing (Kassabian, 2013; Sterne, 2003). "Inside Sound" extends this investigation by proposing that VR environments enable embodied sonic epistemologies previously unavailable.

The concept of navigational listening also challenges sound studies' implicit privileging of audition over other sensory modalities in sonic knowledge production. While scholars rightly critique ocularcentric bias in Western epistemology, simply asserting the primacy of hearing risks creating an equally limited "auralcentrism." "Inside Sound" suggests that robust sonic knowledge might emerge from multimodal integration (hearing coordinated with proprioception, vision, and kinesthesis) rather than any single sensory channel.

The work also engages ongoing debates about algorithmic listening and computational sound analysis. Critics worry that reducing sound to computable features impoverishes acoustic experience, subordinating human perception to machine logic (Miyazaki, 2012). "Inside Sound" proposes an alternative: using algorithmic analysis not to replace human listening but to create new affordances for embodied sonic exploration. The algorithm does not dictate what to hear; it structures what to navigate.

Design Implications for Immersive Environments

For practitioners creating immersive experiences, this analysis suggests three design principles. First, consider how abstract data might become not merely visible but navigable, structuring space in ways that solicit bodily exploration rather than contemplative observation. Second, attend to the temporal dimension: how can dynamic data create histories, trails, and anticipatory structures rather than presenting isolated snapshots? Third, provide agency through interaction that enables hypothesis formation and testing rather than passive reception.

More broadly, the work challenges common assumptions about VR's primary value proposition. Industry discourse often emphasizes "presence," the feeling of "being there" in virtual environments. "Inside Sound" suggests an alternative goal: creating spaces that afford new forms of knowing rather than simulating familiar experiences. The value lies not in replicating concert halls but in enabling cognitive access to properties typically invisible or abstract.

Accessibility Considerations

While current implementation relies on visual perception to observe spectral constellations, the underlying principle, making abstract properties navigable, suggests accessibility opportunities. Future iterations might employ spatial audio cues that encode proximity to high-

Centroid regions, haptic feedback indicating Spectral Spread, or auditory depth cues representing Spectral Flux. Such implementations would realize the promise of embodied access to timbral structure for blind and low-vision users.

Accessibility extends beyond sensory impairment, however. The concept of "epistemic accessibility" asks who can access particular forms of knowledge. Traditional spectral analysis requires expertise in signal processing and acoustic theory. "Inside Sound" proposes democratizing this access through embodied engagement, potentially enabling non-experts (children, musicians without technical training, curious listeners) to develop intuitive understanding of spectral structure.

This democratization has political dimensions. Jonathan Sterne argues that technologies of sonic reproduction create "listening publics" with specific capacities and limitations (Sterne, 2003). Who can meaningfully engage with spectral analysis shapes who participates in conversations about sound quality, acoustic design, and music production. By creating alternative pathways to spectral knowledge, navigational listening might reshape these publics.

Limitations and Future Directions

This analysis faces three limitations. First, it remains theoretical, requiring empirical validation through user studies examining what participants actually learn from navigational engagement. Do they develop transferable understanding of timbre? Can they identify spectral features in conventional listening contexts after training in "Inside Sound"?

Second, the work focuses on room-scale VR, requiring expensive equipment and physical space. Future research might explore how principles of navigational listening translate to other platforms: smartphone AR, web-based 3D environments, or purely auditory implementations.

Third, the current audio library, while diverse, represents limited sonic territory. Expanding to include speech, environmental sounds, or non-Western musical traditions might reveal whether current spatial mappings retain epistemic utility across broader acoustic diversity.

Finally, this analysis barely addresses the aesthetic dimensions of the experience. While focusing on epistemology, we should recognize that navigation through spectral constellations can be beautiful, meditative, or playfully exploratory. The relationship between aesthetic experience and knowledge production deserves deeper investigation.

Conclusion

"Inside Sound" proposes that making timbre navigable creates epistemic affordances unavailable through conventional listening or visual analysis. By transforming spectral audio features into spatial coordinates, the installation enables what we term "navigational listening," knowledge emerging from the coordination of bodily movement and acoustic perception.

This approach draws on Gibson's ecological perception, embodied cognition theory, and phenomenology to argue that physical locomotion through acoustic data constitutes genuine knowledge production rather than merely a novel experience. Participants develop proprioceptive understanding of spectral relationships, discover timbral patterns through exploration, and gain intuitive access to acoustic properties typically requiring specialized technical expertise.

The broader implications extend beyond this specific installation. “Inside Sound” demonstrates how immersive technologies might create new modes of knowing that are neither purely sensory nor abstractly symbolic but emerge from the coupling of perception and action. This suggests possibilities for embodied data exploration across domains: navigating genetic sequences, walking through economic models, or exploring mathematical spaces through bodily movement.

The work also challenges conventional hierarchies in sonic epistemology. By positioning navigation alongside hearing and analysis as a legitimate mode of sonic knowing, “Inside Sound” expands our understanding of how humans can meaningfully engage with acoustic complexity. The body becomes not merely a vehicle for the listening ear but an instrument of timbral investigation in its own right.

As we develop increasingly sophisticated computational analysis of sound, from machine listening algorithms to AI-generated audio, the question of how non-experts access and understand these capabilities grows urgent. “Inside Sound” suggests that the answer might lie not in simplifying complexity but in creating embodied pathways through it. Not seeing sound or hearing data, but navigating the invisible: walking through the algorithmic spaces that increasingly mediate our sonic world.

Navigational listening represents more than an interface or artistic experiment. It proposes a rethinking of the relationship between abstract knowledge and embodied experience, suggesting that the most profound understanding emerges not from distanced observation but from bodily immersion in the very structures we seek to comprehend.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author used Claude (Anthropic) for language editing, drafting assistance, and formatting. The author independently conceptualized and structured the argument of this paper, all iterations on the prose across all sections, and the generation of the associated conference presentation materials (slides and speaker notes). The final manuscript was formatted in accordance with the IAFOR submission guidelines. The author has thoroughly reviewed, edited, and revised all content, taking full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the published work.

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Cloth as Political Language: How Textile Arts Became Instruments of Ideology, Identity, and State Power

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper explores the process by which cloth shifted from depicting Gods to depicting humans, and how it came to serve as a vehicle for political rhetoric, ideological indoctrination, propaganda, and community building. Centered on their use in nation-states and movements across the globe, this study contextualizes textiles as visual media for exerting state control, oppressing communities, protesting against the powers that be, and representing communal membership. Used by governments, reform movements, national leaders, and anti-colonial activists alike, clothed surfaces became battlegrounds through which systems of power were both asserted and undermined. Analyzing examples from South Asia, East Asia, and West Africa, this paper approaches the surface designs of textiles as texts that made systems of power visible. Gandhi utilized hand-spun cotton cloth to promote swaraj, or self-rule, from British textile industries. Military garments, imperial court textiles, and coats of arms across colonial regimes utilized textiles to assert their sovereignty over spaces and their rank over individuals. Kente cloth communicated chiefly authority within African states, and propaganda textiles were deployed to shape the imaginations of the Chinese masses following WWII. Employing a comparative qualitative methodology through the lenses of material culture, visual rhetoric, and archival research, this study argues that textiles served as political manuscripts that solidified power, resisted repression, and constructed ideological systems. Textiles were once used as worshipful grounds for deities to exist, and later came to represent the bodies politic that existed upon them.

Keywords: textiles, political iconography, ideology, nationalism, colonial power, material culture, visual semiotics

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Introduction

As material culture theory shows, objects play a role in the production of meaning rather than simply reflecting it (Appadurai, 1986; Gell, 2013). Textiles have historically played a role beyond mere material coverings. Across civilizations, textiles have operated as a carrier of belief, a marker of status, and a surface of representation embedded within ritual, economy, and identity. In many pre-modern worlds, surface design patterns work as an important aspect of divine iconography and cosmological narratives, transforming fabric into devotional mediums (Dehejia, 1997). The textiles used in South Asian temple hangings, particularly within Hindu ritual contexts in regions such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, as well as in ceremonial regalia, did not merely decorate sacred environments; they structured visual hierarchies, mediated divine presence, and transmitted cosmological knowledge. In largely oral cultures, cloth functioned as visual scripture, offering narrative continuity through repeated iconographic systems.

This section explores how visual hierarchy, as a compositional strategy within textile surface design layouts, is restructured under political regimes. Over time, shifts in political structures, particularly through colonial expansion, nationalist movements, and twentieth-century state formation, redefined the symbolic function of cloth. Authority once reserved for divine figures was transferred onto rulers, imperial institutions, and ideological symbols. Textile surface pattern work that once carried gods increasingly displayed monarchs, military insignia, coats of arms, revolutionary leaders, and political slogans. Textile design iconography moved from sacred representation to political language. This shift did not erase earlier symbolic structures in textile design or pattern representation; it redirected them. Compositional strategies such as centrality, repetition, and chromatic hierarchy were repurposed to visualize sovereignty and state power. As Barthes argues, repetition naturalizes meaning (Barthes, 1977). When rulers and ideological motifs are continually inscribed onto textiles, authority becomes familiar and appears self-evident.

Material culture scholarship reinforces this transformation. Objects shape social relations by structuring recognition and hierarchy. When worn or displayed publicly, textiles become instruments of visibility, a condition essential to the functioning of power (Foucault, 1995). Uniforms discipline bodies, ceremonial regalia stage sovereignty, nationalist cloth signals allegiance, and propaganda textiles normalize ideology through repetition. Cloth does not merely represent authority; it helps enact it.

This study examines how textiles evolved from devotional surfaces into instruments of political agenda, ideological persuasion, and collective identity formation. It asks: how did textiles transition from sacred representation to political texts, and what does this transformation reveal about the visual mechanics of power?

This question moves beyond stylistic analysis to interrogate structural transformation. The study argues that the shift occurs across three interconnected dimensions: on the textile surface (motif and iconographic change), in embodied use (how cloth is worn, displayed, or circulated), and within political context (the broader systems of authority that mobilize textile symbolism). The transformation is therefore not merely aesthetic but structural, relational, and performative.

To address this question, the paper analyzes three primary case studies within a comparative framework based on visual artifact analysis specific to textile surface design pattern work: Asante kente cloth in Ghana, Gandhian khadi in India, and Mao-era propaganda textiles in

China where printed fabrics extended beyond clothing into domestic and environmental surfaces such as curtains, wall hangings, and everyday furnishings (Hung, 2011; Ross & Adedze, 1998; Trivedi, 2007). Colonial military uniforms and court brocades serve as a control case to clarify how hierarchy and discipline are visually constructed. Together, these examples demonstrate textiles functioning as sovereignty, resistance, and ideological normalization

Textile surface design becomes political language because it produces legitimacy through three recurring mechanisms: visibility, repetition, and embodied circulation. Through these mechanisms, authority is worn, recognized, contested, and normalized.

Literature Review

Textiles as Sacred and Cosmological Surfaces

Textiles have a long history as sacred media embedded within cosmological, ritual, and devotional systems. Across South Asia, Africa, and East Asia, cloth operated as more than ornamentation; it structured sacred space and embodied spiritual authority. In pre-modern South Asia, temple textiles depicted narrative cycles from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and Puranic traditions, transforming cloth into a visual scripture accessible to largely oral communities (Dehejia, 1997). These textiles were displayed in temples, carried in ritual processions, and unfolded during festivals, enabling collective viewing and shared interpretive experience.

Such textiles were not passive illustrations of myth. Rather, they mediated the presence of the divine through compositional hierarchy and symbolic density. Centralized deities, chromatic distinctions, haloed framing devices, and narrative sequencing created structured visual grammars that organized devotional attention. Repetition of these visual codes across generations stabilized shared belief systems and produced materialized theology.

Similarly, in West African contexts, woven textiles encoded spiritual authority and lineage through symbolic patterning (Picton & Mack, 1999). Cloth functioned as a visual articulation of cosmology, where color, motif, and weaving technique reflected social and spiritual hierarchies. These textiles operated within ritualized frameworks, reinforcing communal memory and structuring authority through embodied practice.

Material culture theory supports this understanding of sacred textiles as active agents rather than decorative objects. Material objects participate in shaping belief systems and social relations (Gell, 2013). Cloth, in particular, due to its bodily proximity and spatial flexibility, possesses a heightened capacity to mediate experience. Sacred textiles structured ritual environments, framed sacred architecture, and visually encoded moral order.

Importantly, this sacred phase establishes the foundational semiotic infrastructure upon which later political uses of cloth depend. Before textiles became instruments of the state, they were already understood as surfaces capable of carrying authoritative meaning.

Semiotics, Visibility, and the Material Performance of Power

The transformation of textiles into political instruments can be understood through semiotic theory and analyses of visibility. Barthes conceptualizes visual systems as structured languages in which repetition naturalizes historically constructed meanings (Barthes, 1977). Symbols

acquire authority not through singular display but through continual reproduction. Textiles, by virtue of their reproducibility and circulation, are uniquely suited to this process.

Foucault's theory of disciplinary visibility further clarifies how material surfaces produce authority (Foucault, 1995). Power operates not solely through decree but through visible organization of bodies and space. Uniforms, regalia, and ceremonial garments make hierarchy legible. They produce recognition and stabilize command structures through visual differentiation. In this framework, cloth functions as an infrastructure of recognition. A uniform communicates rank; a ceremonial wrap communicates lineage; a nationalist garment communicates allegiance. Authority must be seen to be enacted, and textiles provide that visibility.

Gell extends this argument by proposing that art objects possess agency within social networks (Gell, 2013). Objects mediate relationships and produce effects. Textiles, therefore, are not neutral carriers of political meaning but participants in its construction. Through embodied wearing, public display, and spatial integration, cloth organizes collective perception.

Together, these perspectives position textiles as dynamic political surfaces capable of stabilizing power across regimes.

Colonial Economies and the Political Reconfiguration of Cloth

Colonial expansion dramatically altered both the economic and symbolic status of textiles. Riello demonstrates how global cotton trade reshaped world systems, embedding textile production within imperial expansion (Riello, 2009). Cotton was not merely a commodity; it was central to the economic architecture of empire. Industrial textile production in Britain relied heavily on colonial raw materials and markets, restructuring indigenous weaving economies in colonized regions.

Bayly similarly emphasizes that colonial restructuring disrupted local textile networks, altering both economic autonomy and symbolic identity (Bayly, 1988). Clothing increasingly became a marker of colonial hierarchy. European dress codes distinguished rulers from subjects, reinforcing political stratification through material difference.

Thomas introduces the concept of "entangled objects," arguing that material goods within colonial contexts cannot be separated from power relations (Thomas, 1991). Cloth in colonial settings was embedded within systems of domination, exchange, and identity negotiation. Uniforms standardized identity in service of imperial discipline; court textiles reinforced elite separation through material exclusivity.

Yet colonial restructuring also produced resistance. Textiles became sites of political inversion. When Gandhi promoted khadi, he directly confronted the colonial textile economy (Trivedi, 2007). By rejecting industrial imports and advocating hand-spun cloth, khadi re-signified fabric as moral protest. Cloth moved from imperial commodity to nationalist symbol. Thus, colonial contexts reveal textiles functioning simultaneously as instruments of control and tools of resistance.

Dress, Identity, and Embodied Sovereignty

Dress studies further illuminate how textiles produce identity and authority. Eicher frames clothing as a visible articulation of social order, where dress communicates ethnicity, status, and political affiliation (Eicher, 1995). Unlike architecture or monumentality, dress is mobile and embodied; it travels with the body and transforms it into a political surface.

Ross demonstrates how Asante kente cloth encodes proverbs, lineage, and kingship through structured chromatic systems (Ross & Adedze, 1998). Here, cloth performs sovereignty through spectacle rather than bureaucratic documentation. Authority is worn and recognized in ceremonial display.

Anderson's theory of "imagined communities" provides additional insight into how shared material practices construct national belonging (Anderson, 2008). When populations adopt standardized forms of dress, whether khadi in India or uniform codes elsewhere cloth becomes a medium of collective imagination.

Through these perspectives, textiles emerge as embodied political language, transforming the body into a site of ideological inscription.

Ideological Normalization and Mass Repetition

In the twentieth century, textiles became instruments of ideological dissemination within modern nation-states. Mao-era China provides a particularly clear example. Hung (2011) demonstrates how political imagery was integrated into visual culture through posters, paintings, and textiles. Fabrics depicted workers, soldiers, and agricultural scenes, embedding revolutionary narratives within everyday environments.

Landsberger emphasizes that Chinese propaganda relied heavily on repetition (Landsberger, 2020). Repetition transforms political messages into naturalized truths. Textiles, mass-produced and integrated into domestic life, became ideal carriers for ideological normalization.

Clark argues that Cultural Revolution visual culture standardized imagery across multiple media platforms (Clark, 2008). Evans further notes that clothing was regulated to align with socialist ideals, reinforcing conformity through material practice (Evans, 1997).

Unlike sacred or elite textiles of earlier periods, these fabrics were designed for mass circulation. Ideology entered bedrooms, kitchens, and public gatherings. Cloth thus shifted from representing authority to embedding it in daily life.

Barthes' notion of myth-making is particularly relevant here: repeated imagery dissolves historical construction into apparent inevitability (Barthes, 1977). Propaganda textiles normalized ideology through habitual exposure.

Research Gap: From Isolated Case Studies to Comparative Transformation

While substantial scholarship exists on sacred textiles, colonial dress, kente cloth, khadi, and Maoist propaganda individually, few studies trace these transformations comparatively across global regions and historical phases. Existing research often examines textiles within singular cultural frameworks African dress studies, Indian nationalist clothing, or Chinese propaganda

imagery without situating them within a broader structural evolution of cloth as political language.

This study proposes a four-phase transformational model moving from sacred devotional authority to embodied sovereignty, political resistance, and ideological normalization. Rather than treating these as isolated historical moments, the study argues that they represent recurring structural reconfigurations of cloth's political function.

By placing Ghana, India, China, and colonial Europe in comparative dialogue, this research positions textiles as evolving political infrastructures. It demonstrates that cloth's political potency lies not in specific motifs but in its structural properties: visibility, repetition, portability, and embodied intimacy. This study is the first to propose a unified four-phase comparative model linking textile political functions across three continents within a single analytical framework.

Methodology

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative and comparative research design to examine the historical transformation of textiles from sacred devotional surfaces into instruments of political authority, resistance, and ideological normalization. The methodology treats cloth not as decorative craft but as an active material agent embedded within systems of governance, ideology, and collective identity formation. The research is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates material culture studies, semiotics, dress theory, and political philosophy. Material culture scholarship emphasizes that objects shape social relations, they do not simply mirror them (Appadurai, 1986; Gell, 2013). Semiotic theory further supports reading textiles as structured visual languages that encode meaning through repetition, hierarchy, and symbolism (Barthes, 1977). Foucault's concept of visibility as a mechanism of power clarifies how cloth, when worn or displayed publicly, becomes a technology of recognition and discipline (Foucault, 1995). Together, these frameworks allow textiles to be interpreted as ideological scripts that produce legitimacy rather than simply illustrate it.

Case Study Selection

This study does not seek to provide an exhaustive technical, ethnographic, or regional survey of global textile traditions. Instead, it adopts a comparative interpretive approach that foregrounds visual structure, embodied use, and political function. By focusing on selected case studies with strong archival documentation, the methodology enables cross-cultural comparison of how textile surface design operates as a political language rather than as a purely material or craft-based practice. The primary case studies include Asante kente cloth in Ghana (c.1700–1900), colonial military uniforms and court regalia (c.1700–1900), Gandhian khadi in India (1920s–1940s), and Mao-era propaganda textiles in China (1949–1976). Sacred narrative textiles from South Asia and West Africa serve as the foundational comparative baseline, illustrating earlier devotional authority embedded in cloth. These cases were selected due to their documented political significance, geographic diversity, and availability of museum and archival documentation. Together, they provide a cross-cultural framework for analyzing how textiles operate within varying political registers while maintaining structural continuity across historical transformations.

Visual Analysis of Textile Surfaces

The first analytical phase involved close visual examination of textile examples drawn from museum collections, archival photography, and scholarly documentation. The visual analysis focused on motif transformation (from divine iconography to rulers, nationalist symbols, and ideological imagery), chromatic hierarchy, compositional organization, repetition patterns, and modes of display. Particular attention was given to how meaning shifts directly on the textile surface. Sacred textiles frequently organize imagery hierarchically to communicate cosmological order (Dehejia, 1997), while kente cloth encodes political legitimacy through geometric strip weaving and symbolic color systems (Ross & Adedze, 1998). Colonial uniforms standardize identity through regulated tailoring, insignia placement, and chromatic differentiation (Riello & McNeil, 2010). Mao-era propaganda fabrics embed revolutionary narratives through repeated visual motifs and dominant red coloration (Hung, 2011).By analyzing these surface transformations, the study identifies how textiles visually restructure authority across regimes.

Embodied and Performative Dimensions

Beyond surface imagery, the methodology also examines textiles as embodied materials that shape political experience through wearing, performance, and circulation. Cloth's proximity to the body and its visibility in public space allow it to mediate political identity directly. Sacred cloth operates within ritual environments, structuring devotional participation. Kente performs sovereignty through ceremonial display, while colonial uniforms discipline bodies into visible hierarchies. Khadi transforms everyday dress into collective protest, and Mao-era propaganda textiles embed ideology within domestic routines. This embodied dimension reveals that cloth functions not merely as visual symbol but as performative medium through which political identity is enacted and normalized.

Historical Contextualization

Historical contextualization forms the second major phase of the methodology. Each textile tradition is situated within its broader political, economic, and institutional environment. Asante kente is interpreted within pre-colonial systems of governance where authority was performed ritually rather than bureaucratically. Colonial uniforms are analyzed within imperial expansion and global cotton trade networks that restructured economic hierarchies (Riello, 2009). Khadi is contextualized within British industrial disruption of indigenous weaving economies and nationalist mobilization (Bayly, 1988; Trivedi, 2007). Mao-era textiles are interpreted within socialist state formation and Cultural Revolution visual standardization (Clark, 2008; Hung, 2011). This contextual grounding ensures that visual transformations are understood as responses to structural political change rather than isolated aesthetic shifts.

Comparative Synthesis

The final analytical stage employs comparative synthesis to identify recurring political mechanisms across the case studies. Textiles are examined through three structural dimensions: transformation of surface imagery (divine iconography to political symbols), transformation of embodied use (ritual mediation to political mobilization and normalization), and transformation of function (cosmological order to sovereignty, resistance, and ideological embedding). This comparative framework demonstrates that while the imagery and historical circumstances vary, the mechanisms of repetition, visibility, and embodied recognition persist.

Cloth adapts to shifting regimes of power while retaining its capacity to produce collective meaning.

Scope and Analytical Boundaries

This methodological approach prioritizes symbolic and political interpretation rather than technical textile analysis such as fiber composition or dye chemistry. While material properties contribute to meaning, the focus remains on how textiles operate socially and visually within systems of authority. The research also acknowledges the influence of museum curation and colonial collecting practices on archival visibility (Thomas, 1991), recognizing that preserved textiles may reflect elite or state-sponsored examples more than everyday domestic fabrics. Nevertheless, the archival record itself reinforces the central argument: textiles consistently emerge at moments of political consolidation and transformation.

Methodological Contribution

By combining visual analysis, historical contextualization, embodied interpretation, and comparative synthesis, this methodology establishes a transferable framework for reading textiles as political language. It positions cloth not at the margins of political history but at its center, demonstrating how power is woven, worn, displayed, and normalized across time and place.

Results and Discussion

From Sacred Surface to Political Script

The comparative analysis demonstrates that textiles function not merely as decorative artefacts but as instruments of political communication. Across the selected case studies, cloth operates as a structured visual medium through which authority is constructed, resistance is mobilized, and ideology is normalized. Rather than reflecting power passively, textiles participate in its production. As Gell argues, material objects can act within social systems by mediating relations of dominance, allegiance, and belief (Gell, 2013). Cloth, due to its proximity to the body and its public visibility, becomes particularly effective in this role.

The transformation from sacred representation to political instrument unfolds across three interconnected dimensions: surface imagery, embodied use, and political function. On the textile surface, divine iconography gives way to rulers, nationalist symbols, and ideological imagery. In embodied practice, textiles move from ritual mediation to ceremonial sovereignty, protest mobilization, and habitual ideological reinforcement. Functionally, cloth shifts from expressing cosmological order to enacting sovereignty, contesting imperial authority, and embedding state ideology in everyday life. The structure of authority remains; the referent changes.

Sacred Cloth as Foundational Authority

Devotional textiles in South Asia and West Africa established the visual grammar later adopted by political regimes. Hierarchical composition, central placement of divine figures, and repeated narrative sequencing structured theological authority (Dehejia, 1997). These strategies did more than illustrate belief; they organized collective participation and stabilized

communal memory. The sacred phase therefore created a semiotic infrastructure through which authority could be visualized and recognized.

When political figures later occupied these compositional structures, the underlying logic did not disappear. The centrality once reserved for gods was transferred to rulers and ideological symbols. Sacred visual hierarchy became political hierarchy.

Embodied Authority: Kente and Indigenous Political Legitimacy

In the Asante kingdom, kente cloth operated as a structured visual language of sovereignty. Color, pattern, and geometric complexity encoded lineage, rank, and political identity (Ross & Adedze, 1998). Gold signified divine kingship and prosperity, while black referenced ancestral continuity and maturity. Specific motifs embodied proverbs associated with governance and moral conduct.

The analysis reveals that kente functions through differentiation rather than uniformity. Unlike colonial uniforms that standardize bodies, kente distinguishes them through complexity. Authority is performed through visual density. When worn ceremonially, kente transforms the body into a visible site of sovereignty.

Foucault's concept of visibility as a mechanism of power clarifies this dynamic (Foucault, 1995). Governance requires recognition. In pre-bureaucratic political systems, cloth becomes documentation. Legitimacy is not written; it is woven and displayed. The body wearing kente is read as authority.

This case demonstrates that textiles produce sovereignty through spectacle and embodiment. The sacred logic of hierarchical visibility persists, but the divine referent shifts to human governance. Cloth becomes the medium through which political order is made legible.

Imperial Control: Uniformity, Discipline, and Hierarchical Standardization

Colonial military uniforms and court regalia reveal a different political mechanism: discipline through standardisation. Unlike kente, which encodes hierarchy through variation, colonial uniforms suppress individuality in favour of visual uniformity. Rank is communicated through regulated insignia placement, chromatic coding, and material exclusivity (Riello & McNeil, 2010).

The results indicate that the uniform operates as both a symbol and a disciplinary device. The uniform produces disciplined subjects by aligning bodily presentation with imperial authority. Color bands, medals, and tailored structure make hierarchy instantly legible.

Textile economies were deeply embedded within imperial expansion. Global cotton trade networks reorganized production, labor, and consumption (Riello, 2009). Cloth thus became both economic commodity and visual instrument of domination. Authority was stabilized not only through law and military force but through everyday material practice. This phase demonstrates that textiles can enforce hierarchy by standardizing identity. Visibility here does not differentiate elites through complexity; it aligns bodies through repetition. Cloth becomes a technology of order.

Political Resistance: Khadi and Collective Mobilization

Khadi represents a radical inversion of imperial textile power. Gandhi's promotion of hand-spun cotton reframed cloth as a material act of resistance (Trivedi, 2007). British industrial imports had disrupted indigenous weaving economies (Bayly, 1988). By encouraging spinning and wearing khadi, Gandhi transformed everyday dress into embodied protest.

The analysis reveals that khadi's political power lies in material simplicity. Unlike kente or court brocades, khadi rejects ornamental hierarchy. Its coarse texture and visible irregularities symbolize moral authenticity. Chatterjee describes this as the "inner domain" of nationalist sovereignty a cultural space resistant to colonial control (Chatterjee, 1993).

Anderson's concept of imagined communities further clarifies how khadi operates (Anderson, 2008). When adopted collectively, cloth becomes a visible marker of belonging. Wearing khadi signals allegiance to nationalist identity. The body becomes a moving declaration of resistance. Unlike imperial uniforms that enforce stratification, khadi unifies across class boundaries. Its repetition across public protests converts simplicity into political force. Cloth here destabilizes authority not through spectacle but through collective adoption.

Ideological Normalization: Mao-Era Propaganda Textiles

The Maoist period marks the final stage in the transformational model: ideological normalization. Fabrics depicting workers, soldiers, agricultural production, and Maoist symbolism embedded state narratives into everyday environments (Hung, 2011).

The results demonstrate that propaganda textiles function through ubiquity rather than exclusivity. Curtains, garments, and bedding carried revolutionary imagery into domestic life. Barthes describes myth as a process whereby historical constructs become naturalized (Barthes, 1977). Through repetition, political imagery becomes ordinary.

Clark notes that Cultural Revolution visual culture standardized imagery across media platforms. Textiles extended this regime into intimate space (Clark, 2008). Unlike sacred or ceremonial cloth, which appears during ritual, propaganda textiles appear daily. Ideology becomes habitual.

This phase reveals that cloth can normalize authority by embedding it within routine practice. Political imagery no longer demands attention; it becomes part of the background of everyday life. Power stabilizes through repetition.

Cross-Case Structural Transformations

Across these cases, three recurring transformations emerge:

1. **Surface transformation:** divine iconography shifts to rulers, nationalist symbols, and ideological icons.
2. **Embodied transformation:** ritual mediation evolves into ceremonial sovereignty, protest mobilization, and ideological habituation.
3. **Functional transformation:** cosmological order becomes sovereignty, resistance, and state normalization.

These transformations confirm that textiles persist as political scripts across regimes. Objects circulate within shifting regimes of value (Appadurai, 1986). Textile surface design adapts as power structures change. It remains a visible infrastructure of legitimacy.

The findings extend textile scholarship beyond aesthetic and craft-centered analysis by positioning cloth as a material infrastructure of political communication. By tracing the movement from sacred iconography to embodied sovereignty, resistance, and ideological normalization, this study demonstrates that authority operates not only through law, speech, or institutions but through visual repetition, embodied performance, and everyday material presence. Textiles do not merely encode political meaning; they stabilize and circulate it.

These insights also carry contemporary relevance. National dress, protest garments, campaign merchandise, religious attire, and digitally circulated fashion imagery continue to mobilize cloth as a visible marker of belonging and allegiance. In a media-saturated environment, textiles circulate both physically and visually, intensifying their semiotic reach. The transformational model developed here offers a framework for interpreting these contemporary practices as extensions of a longer historical pattern in which cloth mediates identity, authority, and collective imagination.

Limitations

While this study proposes a comparative framework for understanding textiles as political language, several limitations shape its scope.

First, the analysis focuses on selected case studies from Ghana, India, China, and colonial European contexts to illustrate authority, control, resistance, and ideological normalization. These examples were chosen for their clarity and archival documentation, but they do not represent the full range of global textile traditions. Regions such as the Middle East, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Indigenous American contexts may reveal alternative trajectories in which textiles engage political authority differently. Future research could extend the comparative model across additional cultural and geopolitical settings.

Second, much of the analysis relies on museum collections and archival documentation. Institutional preservation often privileges ceremonial, elite, or state-sponsored textiles over every day domestic fabrics. Consequently, ordinary garments that may have carried political meaning are less visible in the historical record. Many collections were formed during colonial periods, and cataloging practices may reflect curatorial or imperial biases (Thomas, 1991). These archival conditions shape both availability and interpretation.

Third, the study prioritizes visual symbolism, embodied practice, and political function rather than detailed technical analysis of fiber technologies, dye chemistry, or workshop production systems. While this approach enables cross-cultural comparison, it does not fully address the material technologies that supported large-scale textile dissemination in colonial or socialist industrial contexts. Integrating technical textile studies or ethnographic research with artisans could further clarify the relationship between production and political meaning.

Finally, the four-phase transformational model simplifies complex historical processes. Sacred, sovereign, resistant, and ideological functions frequently overlap, and phases may coexist rather than follow linear progression. The model should therefore be understood as a structural heuristic rather than a rigid chronological framework.

Conclusion

This study has traced the transformation of textiles from sacred devotional surfaces to instruments of political authority. Across Ghana, India, China, and colonial imperial contexts, textile surface design pattern work emerges not merely as an aesthetic artefact but as political language. It encodes legitimacy, organizes hierarchy, mobilizes resistance, and normalizes ideology.

The analysis demonstrates that this transformation operates across three interconnected dimensions: shifts in surface imagery, shifts in embodied use, and shifts in political function. While motifs change from divine figures to rulers, nationalist symbols, and ideological icons, the underlying mechanics remain consistent. Visibility, repetition, and compositional hierarchy within surface design enable authority to be recognized, circulated, and stabilized.

Textile surface pattern work is uniquely positioned within political life because it operates simultaneously as a visual system and an embodied medium. It moves with the body, circulates through social space, and becomes embedded within domestic environments. Through these qualities, surface design does not merely reflect power; it helps constitute it. The persistence of politically encoded textile surfaces in contemporary culture confirms that this historical pattern continues. National dress, protest garments, and state symbolism demonstrate that designed surfaces, through motif, layout, and repetition, remain central to the articulation of belonging and legitimacy. Power is not only written or proclaimed. It is designed, repeated, and worn.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, rephrasing applications were used solely for proofreading and refining the language of this manuscript. Additionally, Gemini was used to rephrase tabular headings and organize the structure of visual elements for clarified reading. Their use was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for clarity and accuracy. Apart from the above-mentioned tools, no other generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used to generate or alter the manuscript's content. All ideas, research design, methodologies, findings, analyses, and discussions presented in this paper are the original work of the authors, derived from the careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Appendix

Representative Museum Examples by Transformational Phase

The following examples illustrate archival and institutional documentation supporting each phase of the transformational model presented in this study. These objects are preserved across international museum collections and demonstrate the broader material pattern beyond the primary case studies discussed in the main text.

A1

Sacred Phase—Divine Iconography (Devotional Authority)

Item	Object Title	Approx. Date	Location / Collection	Production Region
1	Vishnu Lying on the Serpent Ananta	18th c.	The British Museum	Srikalahasti, India
2	Kalamkari Rumal	18th c.	The Metropolitan Museum of Art	Masulipatnam, India
3	Hanging with Epic Narrative Scenes	18th c.	The Metropolitan Museum of Art	Masulipatnam
4	Forms of Vishnu	c.1900	Harvard Art Museums	Srikalahasti
5	Dasavatara Canopy Textile	19th c.	The British Museum	Srikalahasti
6	Wall Hanging (Prayer Textile)	1789	MFA Boston	Masulipatnam
7	Kalamkari Panel with Niche	c.1700	The Metropolitan Museum of Art	Masulipatnam
8	Temple Cloth	c.1900	Victoria & Albert Museum	Srikalahasti
9	Rama and Sita Narrative Textile	19th c.	University of Manchester Collection	Srikalahasti
10	Ritual Floor Spread	18th c.	Victoria & Albert Museum	Masulipatnam
11	Mahabharata War – Bhagavad Gita Scene	c.1720	Salar Jung Museum, India	Srikalahasti
12	Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi	c.1820	The Textile Museum, GWU	Srikalahasti
13	Tree of Life Kalamkari	19th c.	Kalamkari Museum, Pedana	Masulipatnam
14	Temple Hanging Depicting Ramayana	19th c.	Saint Louis Art Museum	Srikalahasti
15	NamaVali Textile (Woven with Lord Ram's Name)	19th c.	The Calico Museum of Textiles	India

Note. These examples demonstrate the devotional function of textile surfaces as narrative scripture, cosmological instruction, and ritual authority.

A2

Embodied Authority—Indigenous Political Legitimacy

Item	Object Type	Date	Location / Collection	Cultural Context
1	Kente Cloth (Royal Strip Weaving)	18th–19th c.	British Museum	Asante, Ghana
2	Kente Cloth (Ceremonial Regalia)	19th c.	Smithsonian National Museum of African Art	Ghana
3	Court Prestige Cloth	Pre-colonial	British Museum	West Africa
4	Royal Ceremonial Wrap	18th–19th c.	UCLA Fowler Museum	Ghana
5	Asante Chief's Cloth	19th c.	Metropolitan Museum of Art	Ghana

Note. These textiles demonstrate political legitimacy enacted through ceremonial wearing, chromatic hierarchy, and visual differentiation.

A3

Imperial Control—Hierarchy and Standardization

Item	Object Type	Date	Location / Collection	Context
1	British Colonial Military Uniform	18th–19th c.	National Army Museum (UK)	Imperial Military
2	Regimental Dress Coat with Insignia	19th c.	The Metropolitan Museum of Art	British Empire
3	Court Brocade Textile	Early Modern	Victoria & Albert Museum	European Court
4	Heraldic Banner	18th c.	Victoria & Albert Museum	European Monarchy
5	Cotton Printed Textile (Export Trade)	18th–19th c.	V&A Collections	Colonial Trade

Note. These objects illustrate cloth as an instrument of imperial distinction, disciplined identity, and transnational hierarchy.

A4

Political Resistance—Anti-Colonial Nationalism

Item	Object Type	Date	Location / Collection	Context
1	Khadi Garment	1920s–40s	National Archives of India	Indian Independence Movement
2	Hand-Spun Cotton Cloth	1930s	GandhiServe Foundation	Swadeshi Movement
3	Congress Session Khadi Dress	1930s–40s	National Archives of India	Nationalist Mobilization
4	Charkha-Spun Textile	Early 20th c.	Calico Museum of Textiles	Swadeshi Movement
5	Khadi Protest Garment	1930s	Gandhi Memorial Collections	Anti-Colonial Resistance

Note. These examples demonstrate textile simplicity as political defiance and collective identity formation.

A5

Ideological Normalisation—State Propaganda Textiles

Item	Object Type	Date	Location / Collection	Context
1	Mao-Era Printed Fabric (Workers and Soldiers)	1950s–60s	National Museum of China	Socialist Propaganda
2	Cultural Revolution Textile	1966–76	National Museum of China	State Ideology
3	Propaganda Curtain Textile	1960s	Landsberger Collection	Maoist Visual Culture
4	Printed Revolutionary Domestic Fabric	1950s–70s	State Collections	Socialist China
5	Red-Themed Agricultural Textile Print	Mid-20th c.	Museum Archives	Ideological Repetition

Note. These textiles illustrate how ideology entered domestic and bodily space through mass production and repetition.

Metaphors in Impolite Portrayal of Women Online: The Case of Indonesia's Cyber-Sexism

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper investigates how metaphor functions as a strategy of impoliteness in the online sexist portrayal of women in Indonesian social media. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and theories of impoliteness, the study analyses metaphorical language used to convey offense, dehumanisation, and gendered power relations in computer-mediated communication. The dataset comprises 48 metaphorical excerpts collected from Instagram and X (Twitter), selected through two of the most followed Indonesian feminist-curated accounts and keyword-based searches targeting gendered discourse. Employing a qualitative approach, metaphors were identified and analysed through a two-phase procedure of metaphor hypothesizing and metaphor analysis. The analysis reveals four dominant conceptual metaphors used to target women online: WOMAN IS ANIMAL, WOMAN IS COMMODITY, WOMAN IS (SEXUAL) OBJECT, and WOMAN IS DOWN AND MAN IS UP. In addition, a smaller number of instances instantiate the metaphor WOMAN IS IMPURE, which further contributes to moral degradation and exclusion. The findings demonstrate that metaphor enables speakers to perform highly aggressive face-threatening acts while exploiting indirectness, cultural associations, and evaluative entailments. These metaphorical constructions both reflect and reinforce patriarchal norms and gender hierarchies in Indonesian society. It is prominent that metaphors being used specifically to cause offence to have not been receiving much attention, especially in the realm of cyber-sexism. By foregrounding metaphor as a central mechanism of cyber-sexism, this study contributes to research on metaphor, impoliteness, and online gender-based abuse and highlights the need for further investigation into figurative strategies of offense in digital discourse.

Keywords: metaphor, (im)politeness, cyber-sexism, Indonesia, computer-mediated communication

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Introduction

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) refers to communication that takes place through networked technologies such as computers, laptops, and mobile phones, with social media constituting one of its most prominent forms. While social media offers numerous benefits and conveniences, it also facilitates harmful behaviours such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and cyber-sexism. These phenomena are often attributed to factors such as anonymity and the linguistic, social, and psychological distancing effects of online communication, which can make impolite behaviour easier to produce. Cyber-sexism can be understood as the online manifestation of offline sexism. According to Poland (2016, p. 2), sexism is "a combination of prejudice against persons based on their gender, combined with the privilege and power required to cause harm." Because men as a group generally possess greater social power and privilege, sexist attitudes toward women can contribute to discrimination, restricted opportunities, and various forms of harm. In online environments, such attitudes are frequently expressed through harassment and abusive language targeting women.

As a result, CMC has become an important domain for impoliteness research. Despite increasing content moderation efforts by online platforms, users continue to engage in offensive and abusive behaviour, often using figurative language. Metaphors and metonymies are particularly noteworthy in this regard because they can convey negative evaluations in both direct and indirect ways. Since impoliteness involves intentional and conflictive face-threatening acts designed to cause offense and recognized as such by the recipient, the use of metaphor as an offensive strategy warrants closer examination. Against this background, the present study investigates the use of conceptual metaphors to cause offense toward women in Indonesian social media discourse, focusing on posts and comments from Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) and drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

According to CMT, metaphor is widely used in ordinary daily life that our conceptual system is "largely metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; as mentioned in Coll-Florit et al., 2021, p. 86). CMT also sees metaphor as something that enables us to not only think but also talk about abstract, complex, and subjective areas of an experience. As an example, arguments are oftentimes referred to as WAR or FIGHT. Conceptual Metaphors (CMs) are abstract constructs that could be possibly linguistically instantiated in various Metaphorical Expressions (MEs). CMs are conventionally constructed as [TARGET DOMAIN] IS [SOURCE DOMAIN]. On the other hand, MEs are specific linguistic cases of a CM. For instance, as cited in Coll-Florit et al., p. 87):

(1) CM: ARGUMENT IS WAR
ME: (a) Your argument is **indefensible**.
(b) His criticisms were **right on target**.
(c) I've never **won** an argument with him.

Semino (2008; as cited in Coll-Florit et al., p. 87) mentioned that "CMT is associated with highlighting some concepts while hiding others." To illustrate, <<ARGUMENT IS WAR highlights argument as a competitive, aggressive, and confrontational, while hides its cooperative and constructive sides>>. Consequently, different people conceptualise or interpret the same experience differently and it is reflected in the existence of multiple CMs to refer to one area of experience. Because of this, to detect abstract ideas and assumptions in discourse, CM is generally used.

Literature Review

Previous Studies on Impoliteness, Offense, and Metaphors

The study of impoliteness originated from the assumption that impolite behaviour represents a deviation from socially expected or "normal" conduct, particularly within early politeness research. Since then, scholars have approached impoliteness from various perspectives, including postmodern discursive, interactional, and social psychological approaches. Drawing on Goffman's (1967) theory, impolite behaviour can be broadly categorized into ritual/mock impoliteness, non-malicious impoliteness, rudeness and failed politeness, and genuine, malicious, strategic impoliteness. The present study focuses on the latter category, as it involves deliberate acts intended to offend or harm others.

Insults and the offense they generate are closely linked to evaluation (Demjen & Hardaker, 2016). Although evaluations may be either positive or negative, metaphors and metonymies are particularly effective in conveying negative evaluations due to their indirect nature. In some contexts, such as Malay communication, metaphors are used to express criticism while preserving the hearer's face (Charteris-Black, 2003). Similarly, metaphors may serve as indirect vehicles for criticism in sensitive settings, such as end-of-life medical care (Semino et al., 2017). However, metaphors can also be employed with the explicit intention of causing offense. Animal metaphors are especially common in such cases, as referring to humans as animals often carries dehumanizing and degrading connotations (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). The offensiveness of these metaphors is further shaped by contextual and cultural factors, including the manner of expression and the social status of the target. Metaphors involving negatively perceived animals, such as rats, snakes, or leeches, are often regarded as particularly offensive. Their impact may be intensified when directed toward less privileged or marginalized groups, including women and members of the LGBT community.

Metaphor and Gender

As a matter of fact, metaphors that are used to offend the hearer (e.g., to abuse or insult) often contain a gendered element. In general, gender can be embedded in metaphors in several ways. Metaphors may be used differently by speakers of different genders, or they may be employed to feminise or masculinise certain behaviours, activities, or individuals. Additionally, metaphors can be used to represent men and women in discourse (Koller, 2011, as cited in Demjen & Hardaker, 2016). A considerable number of metaphors fall into the latter two categories. For example, studies on animal metaphors have shown that only a small number are applied to both sexes, whereas most are gender specific. Terms such as *hen*, *bitch*, and *fox* are commonly directed at women, while *stallion* and *stag* are typically used for men. However, according to Demjen and Hardaker (2016), the distribution of such metaphors is not equal. This observation is supported by previous studies on animal metaphors (e.g., Hines, 1999; Leach, 1964), which suggest that women are described as sexual objects through a wider variety of animal metaphors than men. Furthermore, animal metaphors associated with livestock (e.g., *cow*), game animals (e.g., *fox*), and pets (e.g., *pussy*), which imply ownership, domestication, taming, or hunting, are used predominantly to refer to women (Demjen & Hardaker, 2016, p. 357).

Animal metaphors are not the only type of gendered metaphor. Several scholars (Hines, 1999; Kövecses, 2006; López Rodríguez, 2009, as cited in Demjen & Hardaker, 2016) have found that women in English are also conventionally represented through metaphors related to food

(e.g., *honey*, *sweetie*), playthings (e.g., *toy*, *doll*), personality traits (e.g., *ditz*), clothing (e.g., *skirt*), and body parts (e.g., *blondie*, *piece of ass*). Although some of these expressions may be used affectionately, they can also be offensive, demeaning, or patronising. Supporting this view, Kövecses (2006, as cited in Demjen & Hardaker, 2016), drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), examined 245 American English slang terms for women and men and found that four source domains dominate the conceptualisation of both genders: THING (e.g., *package*, *doll*, *piece of*), FOOD (e.g., *sweetie*), ANIMAL (e.g., *cow*, *stud*, *pussycat*, *chick*), and KINSHIP (e.g., *baby*, *lad*). While both men and women were described using these domains, women were associated with a greater number and wider variety of metaphorical conceptualisations. In particular, only women were conceptualised as COMMODITIES, GOODS, MERCHANDISE, and PLAYTHINGS, entities that can be bought, owned, or controlled. Similar to livestock and pets, these metaphorical representations imply male ownership and reinforce the perception of women as sexual objects and socially inferior to men (Kövecses, 2006, as cited in Demjen & Hardaker, 2016). Comparable findings have also been reported in studies of Italian and French metaphors describing men and women (Baider & Gesuato, 2003, as cited in Demjen & Hardaker, 2016).

Impoliteness, Gender, and Sexism Online

Gender is a social construct that is better understood as a continuum rather than a binary category (Butler, 1990; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Nevertheless, research on (im)politeness has often relied on traditional male–female distinctions (Holmes, 2013; Mills, 2003), and numerous studies have shown that men and women are associated with different expectations regarding polite and impolite behaviour. In Indonesian society, for example, expressions such as “Nice girls don’t sit with their legs open” reflect gendered norms that distinguish not only between women and men but also between socially acceptable and unacceptable female behaviour. Such norms contribute to the development of pragmatic knowledge and shape expectations regarding appropriate conduct. Research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) similarly suggests that online interactions largely reflect offline social norms, including those related to politeness and impoliteness. This is particularly evident in the prevalence of gender-based abuse directed at women in online spaces (Poland, 2016). Sexism, defined as prejudice based on gender combined with the social power necessary to produce harmful effects, continues to influence both online and offline interactions. Because men as a group generally hold greater social, political, and economic power, sexist attitudes toward women can restrict opportunities, reinforce inequality, and contribute to various forms of discrimination. These attitudes are manifested in expectations about women’s behaviour and communication, unequal media representation, male dominance, and violence against women. As gender stereotyping and gendered abuse remain common experiences for many women, the increasing integration of online and offline activities has made it difficult to draw a clear distinction between online and offline harassment, with discriminatory practices often extending across both domains.

Methodology

Sources of Data

The data for this study is obtained from the two social medias that are used by most Indonesians, namely Instagram and X (Previously known as Twitter). With Instagram being the top social media compared with X, most data were taken from Instagram. Nevertheless, Indonesian X users are also big in number. Therefore, despite the less amount of data obtained from X

compared to Instagram, it does not bring any disadvantage or hindrance for this study. With that said, this study mostly looked at two Instagram accounts for its data: @lawanpatriarki (which has around 199,000 followers) and @indonesia.butuhfeminis (around 13,300 followers). Both accounts claimed to be supportive of feminism and are against the patriarch. Their activities on Instagram include raising awareness of gender equity, sex education, self-love, supporting the LGBT communities, and actively opposing any kinds of discrimination and offence against women and other marginalised groups. In doing so, they often repost screen-captures of texts, posts, and comments that consist of sexism, oppression, or bullying, and other kinds of harassment that lead to impolite portrayal of woman (and other marginalised groups) and bring such issues to light. For the purpose of this study, posts that are selected from both accounts are those that contain the use of metaphors to target women. For data obtained from X, tweets or excerpts were found through random search using related keywords such as *perempuan* (woman) and *betina* (female). A number of tweets with screen-captures of texts were also randomly found from a long thread of a discussion among women about their ex-boyfriends. Selected tweets are those containing the use of metaphors to target women.

Data Identification Method

Following Coll-Florit et al. (2021), the method used to identify metaphors in this study is organised in two main phases: metaphor hypothesizing and metaphor analysis. The metaphor hypothesizing phase is meant to overcome the problem of time inherent in the above-mentioned methods for manual detection. In the metaphor analysis phase, hypotheses for metaphoricity are validated (or rejected) and clauses are annotated with domain formulae (target domain and source domain) at two levels. Annotators are provided with a detailed annotation guide and a set of auxiliary documents, among them, most importantly, metaphor compendia. Metaphor identification is mainly based on dictionary checks (as in MIP and MIPVU) and metaphor labelling is based on metaphor compendia and metaphor formulation strategies (innovative features of our method). Compendia and formulation strategies aim to prevent divergence in annotator criteria so that the final results are both internally consistent as well as comparable to results reported in the study.

Findings

A total of forty-eight data were extracted from both Instagram and X. After analysing the data, four main types of metaphor conceptualizing the target domain of WOMAN were detected:

1. WOMAN IS ANIMAL,
2. WOMAN IS COMMODITY,
3. WOMAN IS (SEXUAL) OBJECT,
4. WOMAN IS BELOW MAN.

The first three metaphors, WOMAN IS ANIMAL, WOMAN IS COMMODITY and WOMAN IS (SEXUAL) OBJECT, were equally the most prevalent metaphor used in impolite portrayal of women on social media (Instagram and X) by Indonesian, with thirteen data found for each metaphor. Come second is the conceptualisation that WOMAN IS BELOW MAN with seven data found in total. The rest of the data is two excerpts that do not belong in any of the four major types found. Instead, the metaphors being used to convey impolite portrayal of women on social media is WOMAN IS IMPURE. All types of conceptual metaphor found are presented and exemplified below.

Woman is ANIMAL (13 data)

In this type, women were portrayed as various animals starting from eel, louse (or bedbugs), chicken's comb, and pig. See excerpt (1) to (5) below:

(1) *"Jangan joget-joget depan kamera ya cantik, masa iya calon ibu **kaya belut sawah**."*
– don't dance around in front of the camera beautiful, as a mother-to-be (you're) **acting like an eel.**

(2) *"... GUE JG GAK BERHARAP DISAYANG SAMA **CEWEK BGSTT** KEK LO..."*
– I DON'T WANT TO BE LOVED BY A GIRL (LIKE A) DISGUSTING **LOUSE** (or bedbugs) LIKE YOU…

(3) *"Status di KTP belum kawin tapi pas di buka ada **jengger ayam**nya."*
– The status on her ID says unmarried but when (I) opened (her clothes) there's a **chicken**'s comb.

(4) *"ngapain cari istri gabisa masak, **sama aja kaya pelihara babi** maunya diumpanin doang anj (anjing) ... tolol."*
– why looking for wife who cannot cook, it's **the same as keeping and feeding a pig** (dog (shit)) … stupid.

(5) *"**Babi** sia, tong sangenahna ka urg **babi**, tersinggung aing bener yeuh goblog."*
– you **pig**, don't you do whatever you like to me **pig**, I'm offended you stupid.

Among other animals, the most commonly used animal in impolite portrayal of women on social media is *anjing* or dog. A number of different spellings of *anjing* were also used on different excerpts, such as *anjeng*, *anjg*, and the Javanese language version of dog; *asu*. See excerpt (6) to (10) below:

(6) *"koe kafir **anjeng**"*
– you're a **pagan dog**.

(7) *"...gausah bacot lo **anjing**"*
… shut up you **dog**.

(8) *"Woiiiiii **asu**... klw kau sdar diri main pakai otak bodat"*
– Heyyyy (you) **dog**… if you know your place use your brain.

(9) *"Mne duit gw yg pernah gw ksih ke lu. Balikin, woy gendut **anjg**..."*
Where's all my money that I ever gave you, give them back, hey fat **dog**…

(10) *"Bodo amat **anjing**"*
I don't care (you) **dog**.

Particularly, on X, there was a hashtag found that was especially used to offend women; #dasarbetina. The word *betina* in Indonesian means female. However, it is only to refer to female animal, not human. The word *dasar* formally means basic, primary, or natural yet *dasar* in casual conversation means to address something negative or to create critical remark. It functions as an exclamation or swearing that means more or less "basically yes!" or "indeed!" or "yeah it's by nature!" Therefore, #dasarbetina is a hashtag to offend women that, more or less, means "female animal by nature." See excerpt (11) to (13) below:

(11) *"jadi ***betina** itu enak nganggur, ngk beduit tinggal VCS (video call sex)"*
– being a ***female** (animal**)** is good, no (need to) work, (when there's) no money just VCS.

(12) *"pasang foto sexy giliran diajak ngewe malah diblock #**dasarbetina**"*
– (women would) put up sexy photos but when (we) invite them for sex (we) get blocked **#dasarbetina**

(13) *"dasar wanita di colok sedikit bilangnya Aahh #sange **#dasarbetina**"*
– women, insert (it) for a little (and they would be) like Aahh #horny **#dasarbetina**

Woman is COMMODITY (13 data)

The next type of metaphor conceptualizing the target domain of woman is COMMODITY. In this type, various words that are commonly related to transactional activities were used to describe women. Those words are *expensive*, *cheap*, *sell*, *sale*, *pay*, *cost*, and *price*. See all excerpts from (14) to (26) below:

(14) *"... sok **jual mahal**"*
– (you) act as if (you're) **expensive**.

(15) *"Lebih **mahal** yang open BO"*
– (women) who open for bookings are more **expensive** (than you).

(16) *"Jadi perempuan tu jgn **terlalu murah** akhirnya kan dibuang juga…"*
– as a woman don't be **too cheap,** in the end you still get dumped.

(17) *"Secantik apapun kamu semahal apapun skincaremu se anggun apapun wajahmu HARGA DIRIMU TETAP **MURAH**"*
– no matter how beautiful you are how expensive your skincare is how graceful your face is, YOUR DIGNITIY IS STILL **CHEAP.**

(18) *"Nggak usah segitunya juga kali, kesannya **murahan banget** tau nggak."*
– no need to overdo it, (you) look **so cheap** (you) know.

(19) *"Percuma cantik klau tibu di pertontong geratis… **sangat murahan**."*
– being pretty is no use if you show it freely… **very cheap.**

(20) *"KELIHATAN LEKUK TUBUH = PEREK DAN **MURAHAN**"*
– showing body shapes = bitch and **cheap.**

(21) *"... cuma itu kan kamu **bisa jual**, kemolekan tubuhmu…"*
– that is the only thing (you) **can sell**, your body…

(22) *"Perempuan yg belum menikah dicap GAK LAKU…"*
– unmarried (or yet to be married) women are marked as **NOT SELLING WELL** (leftovers).

(23) *"perawan tua, **nggak laku**"*
– old virgin, **not selling well** (leftovers).

(24) *"...memek aja **diobral**"*
– (you're) putting your vagina out **for sale**.

(25) *"Ngewe ajh di coba dulu.. nnti ku **bayar**. Kalau blowjob sampe deepthroat **kena brp?** Gmn? Hotel mkan nnti aq yg tanggung."*
– (let's) try to have sex… I'll **pay**. How much does it **cost** for a blowjob and deepthroat? Hm? I'll cover the hotel and meal.

(26) *"... buka harga ga?"*
– … how much is **your price?**

Woman is (SEXUAL) OBJECT (13 data)

The last metaphor among the top three types is WOMAN IS (SEXUAL) OBJECT. Note that the word "sexual" is put into brackets. This is because sexual object is generally still an object. Therefore, in order to accommodate a bigger scope of data, this paper does not specifically differentiate between sexual object and object. In this type, impolite portrayal of women was delivered using different kinds of words indicating both regular object and sexual object. For regular object, words used were *dodol, beer, valuables, property*, *mark, broken* or *break,* and *used*. See excerpt (27) to (35) below:

(27) *"pgn dptin sesuatu itu kerja **dodol**… idup aja asupannya dari om teross wkw"*
– to get something (you) need to work for it **dodol** (Indonesian sticky dessert), yet (you) live with support from a sugar daddy lol.

(28) *"Cowo makin tua makin matang kaya wine, liat George Clooney, tapi kalau **wanita itu kaya bir gitu ada waktu kadaluarsanya**."*
– the more guys get older they get finer like wine, look at George Clooney, but **women are like beer they have expiry time.**

(29) *"...makin banyak perempuan yang jadi **properti** umum."*
– more women are becoming public **property** (for men).

(30) *"Jd prempuan jgn gmpangan ikut tren yg mnjtuhkan hrga dri, **brang brhrga** tdk diksih smbarangan org ..."*
– as a woman don't be too easy following trends that would bring down your dignity, **valuables** are not for just anyone …

(31) *"Tidak perawan lagi berarti **rusak**?"*
– Not a virgin means **broken**?

(32) *"Carilah gadis yang sudah **rusak**..."*
– Find a girl who is **broken**…

(33) *"Yaudah aku ga peduli masa lalu kamu udah di **rusak** juga yang penting kamu bisa di**rusak** juga sama aku secara gratis"*
– Well, I don't care if you were **broken** in the past as long as you let me **break** you again for free…

(34) *"Cewe itu selalu ada **bekas** nya, kalau cowo ga ada."*
– women always have **marks** (of being used), men do not have.

(35) *"Ih gue mah kalau tidur sama perempuan harus yang perawan, nggak main deh sama **bekas** orang."*
– I only sleep with virgin girls; I don't touch those who has been **used** by other.

Similarly, to describe women as sexual object, the words used were *personal slut, bitch, penis,* and *vagina*. See excerpt (36) to (39) below:

(36) *"Mending lo*** dibayar lah ini ... mau aja dijadiin **pelacur pribadi** cowonya."*
– wh*** are better because at least they get paid… yet this one was okay for being (her boyfriend's) **personal slut**.

(37) *"... ibu kau **lonte** lesbian bodoh,..."*
– your mother is a stupid lesbian **whore**.

(38) *"ceritanya balas dendam haa awkwk **lonte kontol lonte lonte memek**..."*
– it's a revenge haa lol (you) **whore penis whore bitch vagina (pussy)**.

(39) *"TAPI BALESAN LO GAENAK **MEMEK**!"*
– BUT YOUR REPLY IS SO UNFLATTERING (YOU) **VAGINA (pussy)**!

Woman is BELOW MAN (7 data)

Comes second after the top three types of metaphors is WOMAN IS BELOW MAN. There are seven data in total for this metaphor. All describe women as unequal to men, where men are socially above women. Words and phrases used for this situation were *trampled on, serve, help, below, (too) high, obey*, and *bow down*. See excerpt (40) to (46) below:

(40) *"perawan atau tidak, cantik atau jelek, wanita **wajib di injek-injek**"*
– virgin or not, beautiful or ugly, women **must be trampled on** (supressed) (by men)

(41) *"istri itu emang **pembantu/melayani suami**, contoh seprti cuci pakaian suami, tukang masak nasi ddapur... sampai misal suami tidak ridho sma kelakuan istri, jgn harap akan msuk surga"*
– wives are to **help and serve the husbands**, like wash husbands' clothes, cook meals in the kitchen… if husbands don't like what their wives do, don't expect to be able to go to heaven.

(42) *"... tidak boleh menolak, dan perempuan harus cerdas untuk **melayani**."*
– (wives) cannot refuse (husbands), and women must be smart enough to **serve** (the husbands).

(43) *"... walaupun umur wanita tersebut diatas laki-laki, tapi kelakuannya tetap aja seperti **dibawah laki-laki**."*
– Even though the woman is older than the man, women's behaviours are still **below men**.

(44) "*Alasan gua ninggalin lu gitu aja tanpa sebab karena lu **terlalu tinggi** bil, seandainya lu jadi perempuan yang biasa biasa aja ga mungkin gua tinggalin, lu bisa kerja mandiri, pinter, keluarga lu tajir... gua ga suka kalau perempuan lebih tinggi dari gua..."*
– the reason I left you without reason was because you're **too high**, if only you were just a regular girl, I wouldn't have left you, you have a job, smart, your family is rich… I don't like if the girl is higher than me…

(45) "*Istri kalau tidak **nurut** sama suami, buat apa nikah?"*
– If the wife does not **obey** the husband, what's the point of getting married?

(46) *"Istri harus **tunduk** sama suami apa pun yang terjadi."*
– A wife must **bow down** to the husband no matter what.

There are two more data obtained from Instagram and X. Both are conveying impolite portrayal of women on social media. However, these two data do not belong in any of the four major types discussed earlier. Although it is a little uncommon, the conceptual metaphor used to cause offense in these data was WOMAN IS IMPURE. Words used to describe women were *filthy* and *rotten*. See excerpt (47) to (48) below:

(47) *"... lu gatau diri **jijiin** nggilani hati nya busuk lebih **busuk** dari bangkai."*
– you don't know your place **filthy** disgusting your heart is more **rotten** than a dead body.

(48) *"... manusia ga guna lu, cuih... **najiz**... cari makanan mengandalkan kemolekan tubuh..."*
– you useless human, cuih *spitting sound*… **filthy**… make a living by relying on the attractiveness of (your) body…

Although the data for this metaphor type is not as many as the other four metaphors, it is still considered important and worth noting.

Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned previously, cyber-sexism is a combination of prejudice against people based on their gender, combined with the privilege and power required to cause harm in the online world. Women are usually the main victim. The decision to target women with abusive, gender-based harassment online is not random or spontaneous. Women around the world remain significantly underrepresented within the legal bodies that govern the everyday lives of people. Generally, men have significantly more control over the economic fate of the world and, as a result, most of the women in it. Movie and TV shows still feature significantly more men than women, and even when women are present, they are often relegated to supporting roles or are characters whose existence only matters in relation to a main male character. Women are more likely to be sexualized than men in entertainment, and degrading comments about women's bodies and intelligence are common across all types of media. Economic power and the erasure and sexist portrayals of women through entertainment and media are not the only ways that gender comes into play. How people interact with one another at the personal level is keenly shaped by gender,

expectations of proper gender roles and behaviours, and the power structures that uphold men and degrade women (Poland, 2016). In current digital age, all these phenomena are highly reflected online through computer mediated communication (CTC), such as social media.

By exploring how Indonesian people on social media (namely Instagram and X) utilise metaphors in the construction of their impolite portrayal of women, this study can particularly be useful to look at metaphor as a strategy for causing offence, since impoliteness-via-metaphor can pack a particularly rich semantic punch. With that said, this study discovered four types of metaphor conceptualising the target domain of WOMAN. The first one is WOMAN IS ANIMAL, the second one is WOMAN IS COMMODITY, next is WOMAN IS (SEXUAL) OBJECT, and lastly WOMAN IS BELOW MAN. There is also the fifth type of metaphor: WOMAN IS IMPURE. However, the number of data accounted for this fifth type is very little compared to the other four types of metaphor. Therefore, this discussion will largely focus only on the four main types.

As the findings on part 4 of this study has shown, the first three types of metaphors were equally used by Indonesians in social media and have equally the same amount of obtained data. This means, in Indonesian society, women are equally conceptualised as ANIMAL, COMMODITY, and (SEXUAL) OBJECT. Although all three of them are equally used, the degree of offence each of it causes is a little bit different.

Firstly, in WOMAN IS ANIMAL, women were described metaphorically as animal. It is widely noticed that simply referring humans as (other) animals conveys a very negative evaluation and perceived as very dehumanising or degrading. With that said, the most offensive animal metaphors usually involve disliked animals such as snakes, rats, and leeches, which lead to moral disgust through associations of depravity and disagreeableness. As for the case of Indonesian people and their society, the animal metaphors mostly used to offend other people are *dog* and *pig*. This is because the cultural associations of Indonesians with *dogs* and *pigs* are rather negative. In Islam, *dogs* and *pigs* are mentioned to be one of *haram* (not allowed) animals and consequently, as a country with the highest number of Muslim, most Indonesians see *dogs* and *pigs* as unpleasant animals. Therefore, calling someone else as either a dog or a pig is something derogatory. However, this does not apply only to Muslim's society in Indonesia because a lot of other societies with different believes also use animal as a metaphor in their impolite utterances. Interestingly, the extensive use of the hashtag #dasarbetina, despite being unacceptable, also plays a big role on portraying how being a human woman in Indonesia is equal to being a female animal than to men.

Another metaphor is WOMAN IS COMMODITY, where women are specifically portrayed as transactional materials that can be bought, sold, and owned by other human (mostly by men) like livestock and pets. In this study, the common words used in transactional context were found, such as *expensive*, *cheap*, *sell*, *sale*, *pay*, *cost*, and *price*. Drawing from this result, it is obvious that this outcome was driven by a combination of social views of women as inferior to men and as sexual objects. This is linguistically in line with a previous study done in Italian and French by Baider and Gesuato (2013; as cited in Demjen & Hardaker, 2016).

Similarly, in WOMAN IS (SEXUAL) OBJECT, women are portrayed as merely objects or properties that can be *used, marked*, and *break*. To add, body related metonymies were also used as frequent type of figurative reference to impoliteness. For instance, *vagina* and *penis*. Metonymies such as these generally communicate negative evaluations through depersonalisation, similar to animal metaphors. As well-documented, women are more

frequently reduced to their sexual organs via metonymy than men (Gervais et al., 2012; Weatherall, 2002). Accordingly, the results of this study highlight the patriarchal view in Indonesia that women are positioned hierarchically beneath men, as evidenced by the findings for WOMAN IS BELOW MAN, but also that they are expected to remain within the domestic sphere.

To conclude, current study is qualitative in nature and focused on a small and very specific dataset (forty-eight data). However, as mentioned by Demjen & Hardaker (2016), metaphors being used specifically to cause offence has not been receiving much attention. Especially in the realm of sexism. Despite of the fact that there are plenty of studies focus on metaphor and its functions, there is only a few on metaphor's direct involvement in offence. Nevertheless, although there is limited literature on metaphors specifically to cause offence, it does not mean that metaphors (and other tropes such as simile and metonymy) do not occur in insults and offensive comments. This fact is highly proven in this paper. Therefore, the outcome of this study is expected to provide contribution to the development of literature and studies in not only metaphors and impoliteness theories, but also cyber-sexism. Moreover, despite the limited works of literature, the study of metaphor uses in impolite sexism utterances is still very wide and requires more investigation in various other aspects. Hence, further investigation in this field is very encouraged.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Advocating Virtual-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning: Designing Educational Games to Facilitate Learning Motivation in Hong Kong Primary English

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

To reference the literature research and secondary information, this research used educational intervention and was evaluated by both user and functional tests. Regarding the user test, a Hong Kong community center invited primary school students (n = 24) to assist our intervention. They played thoughtfully educational games and provided first-hand experimental feedback regarding emotional, game design, feeling, and feedback-receiving knowledge. Regarding functional tests, this research invited a broad and wide range of participants (n = 46), like pre-service educators and social workers, as participants. Participants are of diverse backgrounds and have professional expertise related to primary education. They provided rigorous and comprehensive evaluations by viewing demo videos and lesson plans and designing teaching and learning materials. They can provide diverse suggestions on the desirability, feasibility, visibility, and ethics. This research finding demonstrated a positive relationship between the application and potential use of 3D educational games and the enhancement of primary school students' learning autonomy, capability, motivation, and interests. Indeed, primary school students used educational games with higher learning attention, capabilities, and consciousness. The educational games provided understanding of different connections, synthesizing, and transformation knowledge in the education settings. This also indicates a potential for creative and innovative pedagogical approaches. Eventually, this research is anticipated to provide pedagogical innovation perspectives with the professional community of different frontline educators, scholars, and practitioners and widen the general public.

Keywords: education games, engagement, game-based learning learning motivation, primary English language, virtual-based learning

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Introduction

Hong Kong primary school students constantly receive English language learning because Hong Kong almost promotes English as a main subject and English as a second language (ESL). Primary school students can always learn, revise, and study different, diverse, and wide ranges of English vocabulary; they always attempt organizations, sentence patterns, parts of speech (POS), and different vocabulary usage. However, it still provides several critical issues, including (i.) constrained student participation and engagement towards learning different vocabulary, noun phrases, professional terminology, and concepts, thereby impacting understanding of the structure within the class and the whole group level, and (ii.) not sufficient or recap repetition of higher frequency words in the conventional Hong Kong textbooks so that students have lower learning motivation regarding writing due to the length and not understanding the meaning of the vocabulary (Bai & Guo, 2021; Lam, 2019; Lee, 2011a), (iii) inadequate memorization and retention of specific terms and vocabulary, and (iv) applications of different vocabulary learning methods like brainstorming or recap should be creative, component, innovative, and vivid pedagogies (Bai et al., 2020; Lee, 2011b; Park & Wang, 2019; Sze, 2008). To employ the educational game, this 3D metaverse educational game is incorporated with different lesson plans and teaching and learning materials, like the scenarios, scenes (via instructions, prompts, and videos), or whole games to reinforce student engagement. Apart from appealing to students who participated, were attracted, and were interested, the educational games were divided into easy-control, manageable, and systematic teaching steps and different small tasks to facilitate primary school students learning sentence patterns, language grammar, and polishing different writing skills and tactics. Indeed, educational games can provide more facilitation of small foundation vocabulary learning tasks. Finally, the whole lesson plan and different tasks for knowledge construction and creation that provides students with keen knowledge and allow students to be more captivated in acquiring selected topic vocabulary, different terms and improvement for writing skills.

Research Background

With the ever-increasing trend of educators and teaching professionals, they have aroused different research interests to apply innovative pedagogies towards primary education after contributing post-COVID-19 educational impacts. Different scholars like Shiu (2024) explored different e-learning, online teaching, and the potential of developing educational games. By incorporating educational games and applications of primary English language, they provided an attractive and compelling context for teachers to design learning products that reinforce students' language proficiency, learning autonomy, competence, and motivation. The effective approach is to design and incorporate educational games into lesson plans and within and without classroom settings. It can enhance the learners' intrinsic motivation. This research paper utilized mixed research methods (qualitative and quantitative) and intervened with one 3D educational game created by the Unity Platform to make the immersive virtual classrooms and user-generated content. The education games suit the design of the Hong Kong Primary 3 English Curriculum, especially our research, which used the "Food and Fast Food" module as a main theme.

Platform and Digital Technology Application

The 3D educational games product used the Unity platform (https://unity.com/cn) to create. This platform is highly recommended to have the necessary and proficient coding knowledge and technical support skills. The Unity platform can not only assist in supporting the creation

of one's own three-dimensional (3D) spaces but also encourage designers to build different 3D immersive spaces for the wide purposes of education, learning, studying, and playing fun and interesting games. This platform is appropriate to incorporate and constantly upload 2D, 3D, and video content and finalize the work directly to design appealing and stunning interactive spaces. Additionally, Spatial.io (https://www.spatial.io/) (Spatial.io, n.d.) and the Unity Platform are advanced and sophisticated platforms that can formulate the virtual interface and create 3D immersive and captivating experiences for different users who readily meet, work, and interact. They are both the best and most recent platforms for creating different spaces as well and constructing meaningful learning experiences. Both Spatial.io and Unity provide an intuitive, ideal, typical, and unique, environment that increases communication and productivity. It is very visible and has the potential to use different educational games and leverage the power of augmented and virtual reality. Aside from the 3D educational game, I also proposed the link with the Padlet (https://padlet.com/) (Padlet, n.d.). and invited our P3 students to use the AI-generated function of adding images, check out the PowerPoint slide content, use the posting button to add writing, share comments, and receive constructive feedback from your classmates and groupmates (i.e., peer evaluation). Thus, using different digital technology techniques and software can provide a whole studying learning journey.

Research Questions

1. What design characteristics, features, and interfaces of 3D educational games most effectively assist primary 3 students' cognitive development of English writing?
2. How can game-based learning components and designs be aligned with instructional learning objectives to satisfy both educator and student learning needs?
3. What are Primary 3 students' perceptions, engagement, participation, and unique learning experiences when interacting with a 3D educational game?
4. What do the primary school students provide feeling and sharing towards 3D educational games?
5. What are the implications and precautions for designing a 3D English educational game with digital storytelling to strengthen Primary 3 students' English writing skills in Hong Kong?

Literature Review

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and ESL (English as a Second Language)

Hong Kong's main education used the ESL (English as a Second Language) approach rather than English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The difference between instruction design (i.e., English Literature) and pedagogies is emphasized in the artistic, culturally rich texts (like the novels and poems) for acquiring literature analysis and appreciation. Instead of ESL (English as a Second Language), educate the English (grammar, structure) mechanism for communication and be more academic/instrumental. Therefore, Hong Kong education focuses on the learners living in an English-speaking place and provides integration to society (Englist, 2023; Hossain, 2024; Pabur et al., 2023). Additionally, the Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB) thinks that Primary English as a Second Language (ESL) is imperative. The Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB) uses the English Language Education Key Learning Area (KLA) and highlights developing students' language proficiency for study, work, and life purposes. The Hong Kong Education Bureau provided an updated English Education Curriculum (i.e., the 2025 Primary 1–6 English Education Guide) (Education Bureau, 2025).

It provides details regarding reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary (Education Bureau, 2021, 2024, 2025; Gray & Jones, 2015; Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 2019). Certainly, the difference between English as a secondary language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) is the complexity, fluent proficiency, and requirement of students' learning capability (enhancement of the language enrichment and cultural awareness) and educators' training and support. Students as learners and readers should use different vocabulary drills, exercises, grammar practice, comprehension activities, and literate language development (Baba, 2022; Collie & Slater, 1987; Khatib et al., 2011; McKay, 1982, 2001; Poly U, 2019; Rashid & Hui, 2022).

Educational Games, Game-Based Learning (GBL), and Gamification

In the scholar community, there are different discussions about education games, game-based learning (GBL), and gamification (Azawi et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2024). Educational games are defined as the solid structure of playing that provides rules, objectives, challenges, and difficulties for diverse use, like entertainment or education (Cheng et al., 2015). It can consider students may be beneficial to gain more computing programme skills, problem-solving skills and generic skills (Gundersen & Lampropoulos, 2025). Aligned with the educational game purpose, gamification employs various game elements (like points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges) in non-game contexts, including the use of education, to make interactive and immersive tasks, learning engagement, motivation, and outcomes. Gamification refers to the learning process as a whole in game literature. It firstly appeared in 2008 and became more essential in the 2010s (Chen & Foung, 2020; Deterding et al., 2011; Landers & Armstrong, 2017; Seaborn & Fels, 2015). Games are generally provided for the game characteristics, mechanics, or the process of playing games and gameful experiences in specific backgrounds and contexts. Deterding et al. (2011, p. 11) provided definitions of gamification as the “use of game elements in non-game contexts.” The game elements include levels, points, badges, leaderboards, avatars, quests, social graphs, or certificates (Krath et al., 2021; Zainuddin et al., 2020). In the education context, educational game design will incorporate clear instructions, prompts, scenarios, and reminders. Game design also needs to be aware of token economy and reward mechanisms. For instance, primary school students can also gain the certificate after games completion, encouragement, and assurance of the efforts. Also, Kapp (2012) and (2015) emphasized goals of designing the game, including the “game-based mechanics, aesthetics, and game-thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems” (p. 54). Overall, applying educational games can facilitate learning and enhance the learning outcome, like learning motivation and enrichment of language learning. Zichermann and Cunningham (2011, p. xiv), Gunawan (2025) and Wood and Reiners (2015) give a definition of gamification as “the process of game-thinking and game mechanics to engage and solve problems” It is essential to have clear game logic, and the mechanism of making educational games is more attractive and competitive. To integrate and synthesize different beneficial educational game designs and viewpoints, Seaborn and Fels (2015) provided the definition of gamification as “the intentional use of game elements for a gameful experience of non-game tasks and contexts” (p. 17). Certainly, there can be a positive relationship between gamification and reward mechanisms. For example, incorporating reward certificates can reinforce students' learning motivation and academic outcome. Therefore, it is highly recommended to use the basic design of educational games in Hong Kong's education system. Simultaneously, Deterding et al. (2011) and Krath et al. (2021) provided that gamification could provide broad concepts and game components in the authentic environment, including education changes. More in-depth and detailed evidence demonstrates the positive relationship between game-based

learning (GBL), positive affective outcomes (e.g., motivation, enjoyment, and flow), behavioral outcomes (e.g., participation and collaboration), and cognitive outcomes (e.g., knowledge acquisition, critical and creative thinking) (Bai et al., 2020; Boyle et al., 2016; Connolly et al., 2012; Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Qian & Clark, 2016; Sailer & Homner, 2020; Triantafyllou et al., 2025; Van Gaalen et al., 2021; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2017). Practice education examples are available (Al-Khresheh, 2025; Creative English Teacher, 2024).

Metaverse Learning

In the academic community, metaverse learning hands-on examples are the United States operated to use the MoEvGame and mobile health (mHealth) gamification iPad software system and decide the game and technology for children to access and connect motor functions (Mia et al., 2025). Another uses the old adults or elderly who use the Intelligent Rehabilitation Exergame System (IRES) to make appealing and interesting retro interactive exergames that comprise authentic and real-time surface electromyography evaluation. It can promote the elderly body's physical function and their standard (Chang et al., 2025). The user-friendly and interactive content is appreciated, with diverse age group members. Hong Kong Unity platform hands-on examples are applied to History Subjects. By incorporating STEAM education with Chinese culture and national education, students can apply Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to participate in the 3D stereoscopic creation game “Treasure Hunt of Chinese Cultural Relics.” The educational game takes players on a journey through time as archaeologists, transforming national education and knowledge of Chinese culture into a fun adventure game (HK01 News, 2022, 2026). Concurrently, A local educational company incorporates educational technology into academia, combining educational technology with gamified learning to break through the stereotype. Meditation practice is not boring for students and enhances their learning interests (HK01 News, 2022). Therefore, metaverse learning can bring people more compelling and stimulating learning interests (BBC, 2022).

Blended and Personalized Learning

Apart from game-based learning and gamification during playing the games, or metaverse games, when foreseeing the games in 3D (three-dimensional) formats. It is very essential to discuss other key aspects, like blended learning. During our proposed lesson plan design, the plan is advised to incorporate blended learning in learning English and include language acquisition, facilitating English knowledge acquisition. Additionally, it can incorporate various and interesting learning and teaching activities to facilitate more primary students' engagement and intrinsic learning motivation.

Categories and Incorporation of Assessment

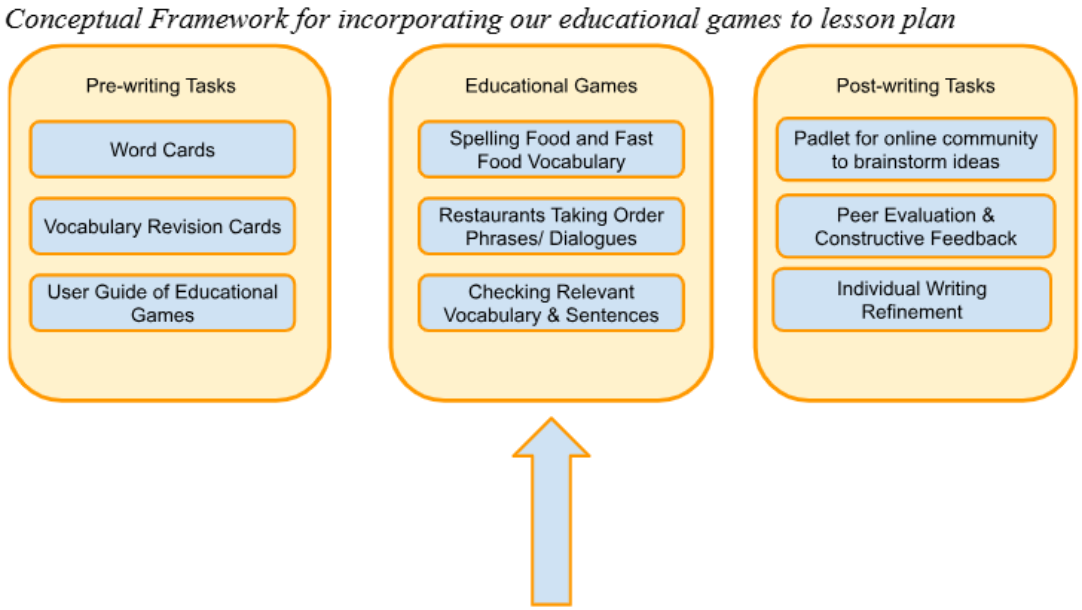
According to the achievement of primary school students learning English, the whole research project is to apply several concepts like game-based learning (GBL), metaverse-based learning, and blended learning. Although comprising a different pedagogical approach, it highlights the essentials of assessment to access and evaluate students' performance. For instance, game-based learning (GBL) can assist more educational settings that include more learning methods, learning processes, information, and enhancement of abilities in games. Thus, different students participate as the players who can address puzzles and compete to win during learning (Lee et al., 2022). Game-based learning can aid in arousing primary

students' attention more effectively and efficiently and stimulate students' learning performance and learning ability. Finally, it can provide better recall of memory and material (Aksakal, 2015). Different assessments like metaverse games, spelling tasks, collaborative writing tasks, Padlet peer evaluation, self-assessment, and individual writing assessment. Additionally, Dorji (2022) discussed and mentioned that the supporting argument of allowing more education games in the classroom is actively enrolled in the consideration of self-assessment, self-awareness, self-monitoring, and reflective processes. Moreover, Kocadere and Çağlar (2018) also provided that gamifying physics instruction can positively have a significant impact on student attitudes regarding various subjects. Therefore, it is suitable to incorporate some of the assessment methods and tools in order to make the assessment or evaluation in a more accurate way and benefit the learning and teaching. Additionally, this paper also advised using the Metaverse for assisting in learning the spelling of some food and fast food vocabulary. It is essential to use the metaverse for writing assessment to ameliorate accessibility and flexibility for students to learn English writing. Students can access information to present their own ideas, thoughts, and organization of some content. For educational games, it can easily be convenient for participants to browse websites, online materials, and online dictionaries. The education metaverse also creates authentic and realistic scenarios that increase emotional engagement. As proposed, for the students and parents, they can choose to use flexible blended learning and a personalized learning experience that cultivates deeper language understanding and retention. Thus, it can improve students' assessment outcomes (Asmaroini et al., 2023; Li & Yu, 2023; Thango, 2024). Indeed, metaverse-based technology provides a new way for innovative English learning. Different educators may design more lessons and engagement activities to assess learners' outcomes. The commencement of the technology era may increase students' technology-based learning methods, engagement, enhancement of language proficiency, and fostering of different digital tool applications. Educational games can demonstrate the significance of language proficiency, digital skills, and advocacy of digital literacy. For the training of digital literacy, students may also navigate challenges posed by learning software and complicated processes. The education metaverse has lower costs and expenses (Li & Yu, 2023; Thango, 2024). Blended learning may also extend the discussion to micro and macro teaching and learning (Albiladi & Alshareef.,2019; Lam, 2022a, 2022b, 2024).

Another, educational games should also use the self-determination theory (SDT) to evaluate the effectiveness of student engagement. For example, it is essential to foster the satisfaction of three innate needs identified in self-determination theory (SDT), like autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Chiu, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1
Research Conceptual Framework



Grounded in different theories of different educational games, game-based learning, and gamification, different instructions and designs integrate an overall nine elements showcased to promote engagement and learning (Krath et al., 2021; Lam, 2022a, 2022b). Nine elements are (i.) explicitly connected to have the lesson goals, objectives, students' capabilities, and how it's relevant to students' learning needs; (ii.) provided clearly tailor-made goal-setting that aligns with learner profiles and proficiency; and (iii.) quickly instantaneous and instant feedback embedded within gameplay. Moreover, education games can offer positive reinforcement and different encouragement strategies through learning rewards and progress indicators; (iv.) provide peer appreciation and evaluation strategies; (v.) apply more adaptive and diverse learning strategies to consider suitable difficulties and pacing; (vi.) facilitate different guided learning trajectories with scaffolding or instructions; (vii.) used streamlined, low-friction and pressure-free user experience to minimize extraneous cognitive load; (viii.) seized opportunities of using task-based learning sequence. This paper utilized Lam's (2022a, 2022b) conceptual framework and various intervention strategies to formulate our 3D educational games. This intervention applied an individual–group–individual sequence to structure comprehensive lesson design and task-based learning. These lesson plans will have a pre-task, a main task, and a post-task. The lesson of the pre-task incorporates the vocabulary review cards and an in-game user guide. Educators can provide instructions and introductions for educational games. Also, the main task is to make use of our 3D (three-dimensional) educational games. Moreover, the post-tasks should be aligned with the main tasks of spelling vocabulary tasks (with fill-in-the-blanks). It should have consolidation learning (like recapping what they learn and offering mini-tests to see learning results). It can have the transitions to educators who scaffolded writing. Further, in order to reinforce e-learning, we invited students to have the Padlet and e-learning, which can have collaborative learning and self-regulated learning. Padlet can have different co-writing and benefit from discussing how to write vocabulary, sentence patterns, and managing the whole writing. The recommended design purposefully aims to manage blended learning and self-regulated learning (with writing one's own personal version afterwards by gathering collaborative

work). It can capitalize on different learning tasks, like pre-learning tasks for videos, main educational games, Padlet, and different online tools for writing, with no limits within and without the classroom. Blended learning defines "fundamental redesign that transforms the structure of, and approach to, teaching and learning." (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Poly U, n.d.) Yet, actual activity or instructions and hybrid mode with providing online learning materials may maximize learning outcomes. Blended learning and microlearning are applied. Overall, in an authentic teaching and learning environment, educators can integrate different pedagogies regarding learning objectives and students' needs to co-create a more effective learning environment that is flexible and tailor-made with diverse and various students' learning needs (Lam, 2022a, 2022b, 2024).

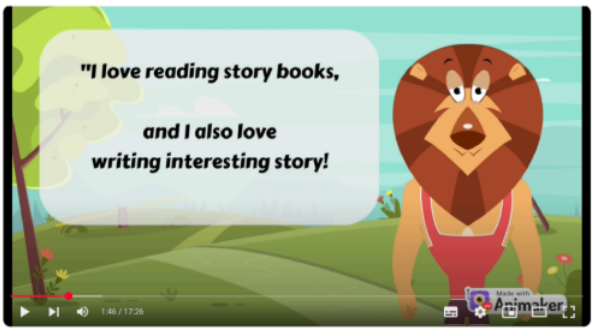
Figure 2

Screen for the Game Starts



Figure 3, 4

The First Instruction Videos, Introduce Your Role of Sam, Lion Images and Finds Friend Lily in the Ku Ku Planet



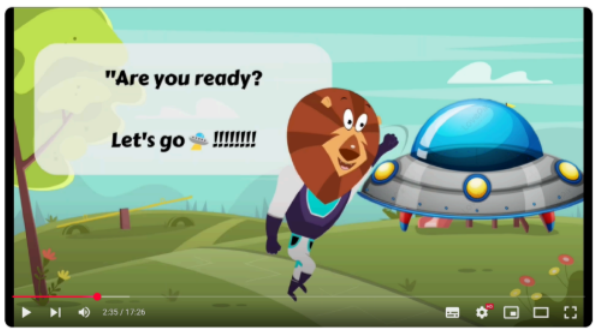


Figure 5

Introduction of Kuku King



Figure 6, 7
Kuku Restaurants Customer Conversation and Food Restaurants (for Giving Food to the Customer)

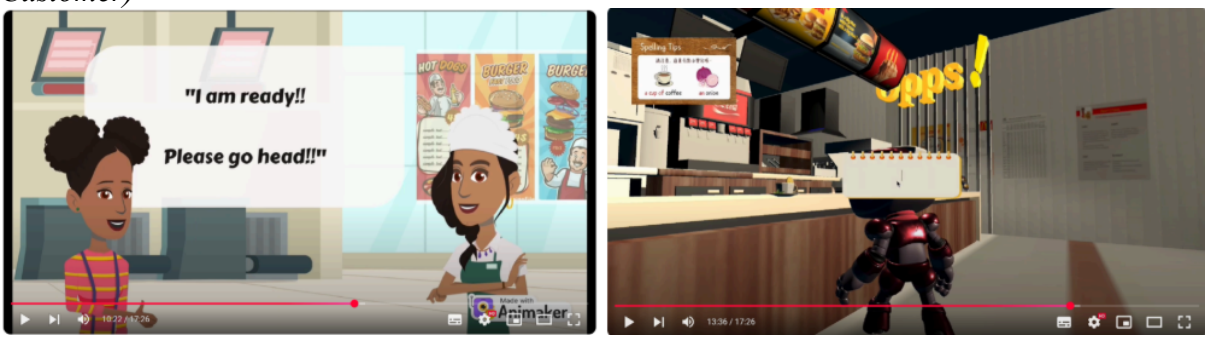


Figure 8
First Padlet for Gathering AI/ Website Findings Images

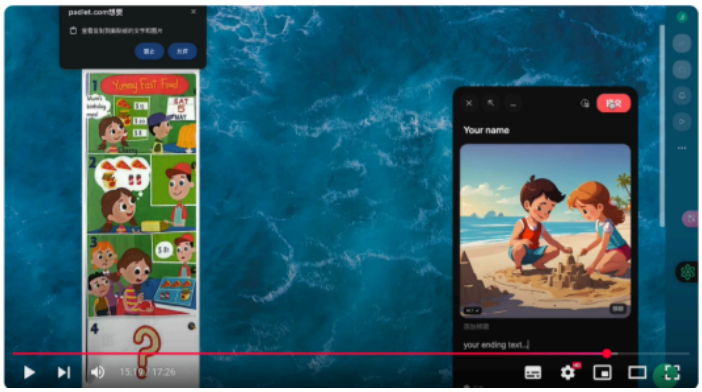
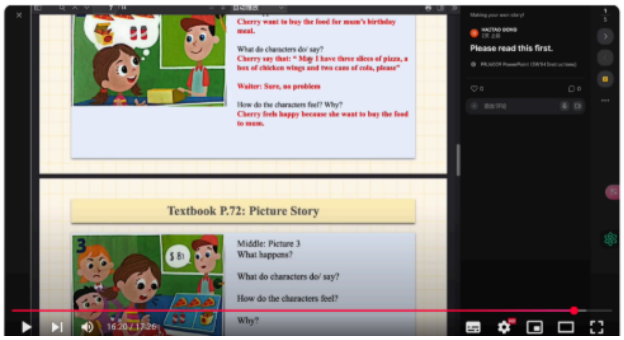


Figure 9, 10
Second Padlet for Gathering Students' Writing Work



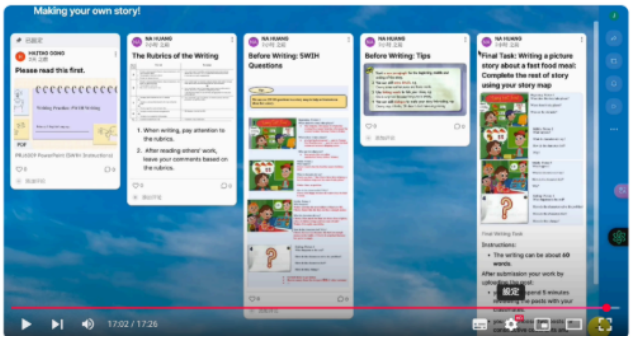
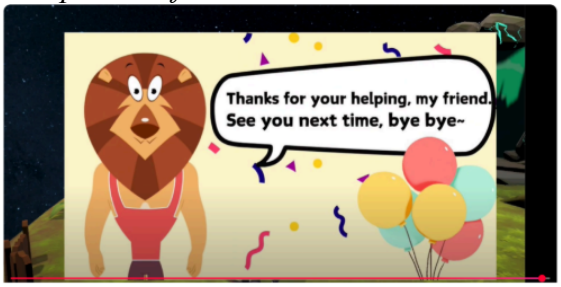


Figure 11
Completion of Game



Methodology

Studying Research Methods

This research adopted experimental verification research methods, including combining research methods like qualitative and quantitative research methods. This single direction of the pilot study comprises participants' user tests (n = 24) of primary school students (i.e., worksheets as an evaluation) and how students respond. Also, it also incorporates some of the pre-service teachers, social worker or other professional discipline workers, participants (n = 46) through using the survey for the functional test with the questions guide in order to generally know the effectiveness of educational games (including educational games, user interface design, games function design, and instruction planning design). This research was conducted between January and March 2025 at one of Hong Kong Tai Po Children and Youth (C&Y) Community Centres.

Pre-pilot Study (Cross-Check Games Function)

To strengthen the rigor of the pilot, I divided it into two stages to complete the pilot study. Firstly, I have shared the preliminary game design with some professional pre-service teachers or professional students to get some initial advice, peer evaluation, and peer review. Their formative input informed revisions to game functions, interface elements, and instructional flow prior to the formal pilot.

Formal Pilot Study Procedures

To consider the ethical and moral considerations, the pilot study was approved verbally and formally by the lecturer of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the Education University of Hong Kong. Also, participants signed formal consent from the Tai Po Children and Youth Centre and provided informal consent to the research chief investigator (CI) where appropriate. Basically, considering the group of user participants are minors and children, this research used anonymous and pseudonymous labels (i.e., using the labeling as “Students A” and “Students B”) to protect their information that can disclose or identify their own personal particulars. Also, for the functional test, in order to ensure the security of personal particulars, the functional test will note and record the email address for checking the authenticity, convincingness, and trustworthiness of the interviewer. The functional test collected basic demographics and overall comments on game effectiveness, including user experience, interface design, functional features, and instructional design.

Data Collection

This research used two main evaluation methods, like the primary student user test. The design of worksheet-based evaluation captures usability, engagement, and learning-related responses. Also, we use the structured survey (i.e., functional test) with guided questions assessing the perceived effectiveness of the educational game’s design dimensions (UI, functionality, and instructional planning), alongside open-ended suggestions.

Instruments and Measures

Implementation Stage: Intervention

Each selected and approved participant engaged in one 75-minute session. Totally, the session comprised a total of approximately 45–50 minutes for games and immersive experiences to participate in the VR immersive learning environment. For safety, participants were conducted and seated during all sessions. The equipment consists of a few computers and a visualizer. To ensure smooth adaptation to the digital environment, the facilitator followed a sequential process of learning, familiarization, and interaction during the VR learning session. To facilitate smooth adaptation to the digital context, the facilitator implemented a sequenced protocol with presentation notes that began with a brief orientation to learning objectives, followed by familiarization with devices, controls, and the user interface, then guided games interaction. Participants may not necessarily be familiar with it, Participants adaptation, engagement, and interaction with the system were systematically recorded as part of the research observation.

Results and Discussion

Educational Research

Testing Prototype During Educational Experiment

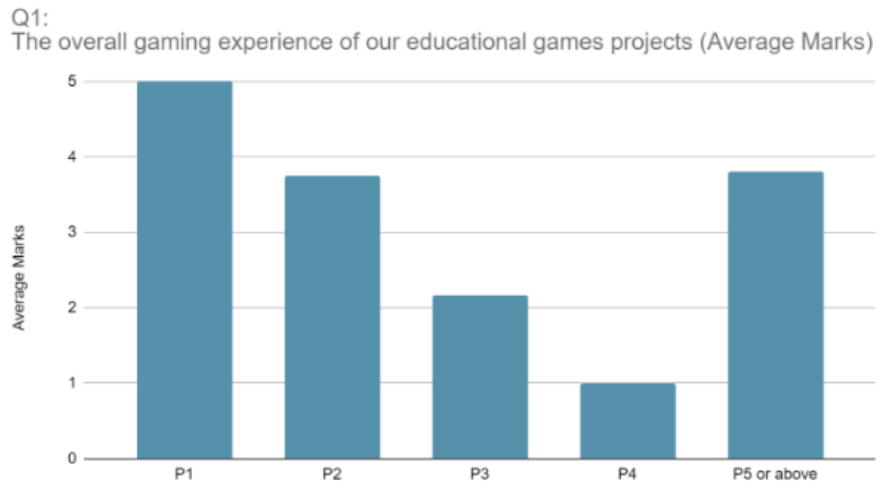
In order to provide detailed, wide, and solid evaluation and continuous improvement, I scheduled four types of tests and evaluations: pilot testing, AI-based checking (comments, suggestions, strengths, and weaknesses), conducting participants' user tests (including selected in-depth interviews), and functional testing. Overall, the educational experiment assess the product's usability, engagement, and pedagogical effectiveness, and to identify actionable areas for refinement.

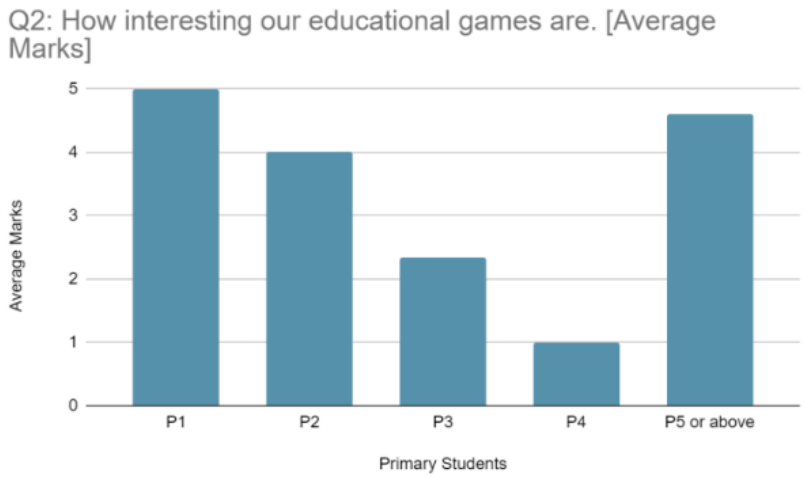
User Test

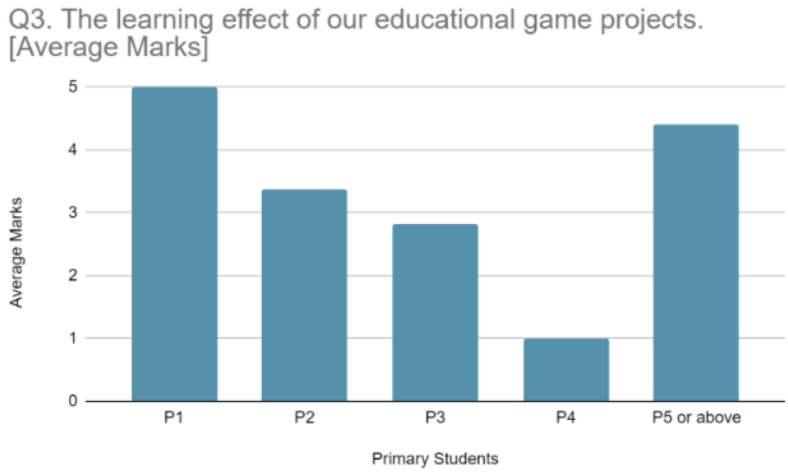
During the user test, I totally conducted it with primary school students (n = 24) in Tai Po at the Hong Kong Children and Youth Services Centre. I prepared PowerPoint slides to outline the project, explain how to do basic background content, and present our educational games' metaverse interface/images, videos, and prototype model and allow students to complete learning materials (i.e., writing tasks, Padlet, and innovative self-evaluation worksheets). Overall, it can enable comprehensive assessment and observe Padlet written work on educational games. Throughout the learning process, the user test conducted lasts for around 1.5 hours. During the learning process, the researcher, as an observer, is to discover students' learning motivations through clear playing game instructions. Although some students felt like spelling, texting, and writing experience were normal feelings, more students found the games fun and interesting. Uneven collaboration occasionally led to students feeling underutilized. Instructors mitigated this by giving clear instructions and assigning distinct roles. Additionally, observing the learning behavior, some students misspelled or couldn't spell the common words (e.g., mushroom, ham, apple) and asked peers for word meanings, indicating the game effectively functioned as a light "quiz" or recap for vocabulary learning. Yet, colorful and creative design can eliminate this situation, and students feel comfortable to work on. Regarding usability and overall design of educational games, primary students advised clearer conversation fonts, simpler vocabulary, and more attractive words and

images. Students particularly appreciated the scenes, videos, and the Kuku King (a robot). Still, it is highly recommended that it address the need for clearer prompts and reminders after incorrect answers. It should have more activities and sentence writing. During the verbal qualitative research feedback, primary students may recommend conversations be more engaging and interactive. It is recommended to reduce the wordings and make Lily's response more clearly, explicitly, and specifically. Also, it can make Lily's responses more human instead of sometimes AI ideas. More choices of food and fast food are observed. Some technical support was included to improve mouse control clarity. To review detailed students' self-evaluation worksheets, (i.) Overall gaming experience: Mean 3.29 (65.8%), Median 4, Mode 5 (9/24), SD 1.67. (ii.) Also, Q2. How interesting the games are: Mean 3.58 (71.6%), Median 4.5, Mode 5 (12/24), SD 1.63. Moreover, (iii.) Q3. Learning effect of the games: Mean 3.38, Median 4, Mode 5 (10/24), SD 1.65. Overall, the interpretation of survey is the primary school students were generally satisfied, found the games interesting, and perceived meaningful learning benefits, though revisions are needed for stronger outcomes. Additionally, overall in observing different groups, like Q1 (overall experience): P1 average 5 out of 5; P2 average 3.75 out of 5; P5 or above primary school students average 3.8 out of 5. Also, during the other questions, Q2 (interest): P1 average 5 out of 5; P2 average 4 out of 5; P5+ average 4.6 out of 5. Moreover, Q3 (learning effect): P1 average 5 out of 5; P2 average 4.4 out of 5; P5+ average 3.38 out of 5. Apart from the proposed research groups may include overall age groups (grade and age) of primary school students, in order to consider the boundaries of suitable age groups games and considering different academic learning abilities, it still provides credible learning educational experiments to show particularly strong positive responses. Overall, this game is suitable for primary 3 students.

Figure 12, 13, 14
Overall Game Experience Evaluation







Functional Test

In order to collect more concrete and specific research findings, we also collected functional test total participants (n = 46). The participants include Undergraduate or above students, especially those who are pre-service teachers and receiving education programme training. Also, some university teachers (i.e, lecturer), in-service educators and social workers also provide all-round quantitative research feedback as well. During the functional test, participants can review relevant lesson materials and videos of educational games in order to learn the operation and implementation procedures. Some were later invited for in-depth interviews. Q1. Overall prototype score (1–10): Mean 7.17, Median 7.5, Mode 8 (14/46), SD 1.79. Participants considered the game suitable for primary students, appealing, and recommendable, with room for refinement. Regarding some of generic skills and capabilities, Sensitivity: Mean 3.22 (64.4%), SD 0.67; Flexibility/feasibility: Mean 3.26 (65.2%), SD 0.68; Creative/innovative thinking: Mean 3.47 (69.4%), SD 0.54; Connecting/synthesizing/transforming to education: Mean 3.26 (65.2%), SD 0.70; Language proficiency: Mean 3.20 (64.0%), SD 0.71; Presentation of ideas: Mean 3.23 (64.6%), SD 0.81; Functions of product prototype: Mean 3.28 (65.6%), SD 0.71; Technology use/materials: Mean 3.26 (65.2%), SD 0.60; Suitability for Primary 3: Mean 3.22 (64.4%), SD 0.69 and Efficiency of evaluation: Mean 3.28 (65.6%), SD 0.58. Therefore, primary 3 students are normal, appropriate and together with lesson content, teaching materials and capabilities to handle the topic. Throughout the result, this research highlighted a few key points; for instance, it can provide game-based learning, educational gamification, and implement fun learning. Students like learning through games with little vocabulary.

Simultaneously, the prototype blends educational content with gameplay, making English learning enjoyable for Primary 3 students. Additionally, it can consider a few designs, like interactivity and immersion. 3D environments and character interactions (e.g., cute robots) can maintain students' learning motivation. Additionally, using creative and thoughtful design, colorful visuals, well-conceived characters, and platform integration (e.g., Padlet) enhances the accessibility and appeal of educational games and learning materials packages. Room for improvement is about how to make interactive user-generated content, user interface, and readability; increase font sizes; and improve text clarity for young child learners. Also, when designing educational games, it also considers the game structure and pace (including challenges and difficulties of the educational games). Additionally, some educators discovered that we should shorten dialogues and videos, use shorter sentences, and add more interactive checkpoints to sustain engagement. In addition, it can have aesthetic and visual elements. Some pre-service teachers claimed that background colors and considered alternative formats (e.g., 2D or visual novel format) where clarity is paramount. Implementing the above changes will likely improve usability, comprehension, and overall enjoyment for the target age group. For the open question, this functional test collects responses and perspectives on the immersive media for promoting English education, learning, and teaching. I noted one interviewee response: “It’s pretty good. It feels like playing a game where you learn a lot of English-related knowledge. It uses strong game-based learning and educational game elements.” The response summarizes how 3D educational games can provide learning engagement, motivation, drawing attention and interests, encouraging active participation, and keeping interactivity. Yet, it should consider the interactivity, differentiation (learning diversity), instructions, guidance, scaffolding, and risk of distraction. The academic and practical research is anticipated to apply mixed-method evaluation (quantitative + qualitative research methods) in order to demonstrate the accurate feedback and response.

Table 1
Results of Functional Test

	Mean	Median	Mode [Appeared Time]	SD	Range (Max and Min)
Sensitivity	3.22 (64.4%)	3	3 [22]	0.67	4
Flexibility/ Feasibility	3.26 (65.2%)	3	3 [22]	0.68	4
Creative/Innovative thinking	3.47 (69.4%)	3.5	4 [23]	0.54	4
Connecting, synthesising, transforming to education	3.26 (65.2%)	3	3 [23]	0.70	4
Language Proficiency	3.20 (64.0%)	3	3 [24]	0.71	4
Presentation of ideas	3.23 (64.6%)	3	4 [20]	0.81	4

Functions of Product Prototype	3.28 (65.6%)	3	3 [22]	0.71	4
Technology Use/ Technology Materials	3.26 (65.2%)	3	3 [27]	0.60	4
Suits to primary 3 students	3.22 (64.4%)	3	3 [25]	0.69	4
The efficiency of evaluation in the functional test	3.28 (65.6%)	3	3 [27]	0.58	4

Discussion

The technological and pedagogical affordances of immersive media are to provide safety and game-based environments for primary English language learning, especially vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and light formative assessment. The participants can receive immediate feedback, positive reinforcement, and overall learning motivation. The technological affordances of immersive platforms (e.g., situational authenticity, embodied interaction, narrative context) suggest potential for transferring vocabulary knowledge into use through task-based activities and micro-scenarios. Additionally, to consider teaching innovation and assessment, research demonstrates that immersive environments (e.g., embedded micro-assessments, adaptive prompts, performance analytics) have prospective benefits for formative feedback and learner self-regulation. However, implementation fidelity remains a critical determinant, including educators' instructions, guidance (process of scaffolding), and transparent assessment criteria.

How to Use the “Gamification” Concept in Our Instruction Design?

After discussing the use of 3D Unity Platform-designed educational games, it is highly recommended to cover the discussion on gamification, which demonstrates the efficiency and effectiveness of how to use the educational games, applied authentic assessment, and teaching and learning theory. For example, it used the assessment for learning (AFL) when using the educational games, different worksheets, Padlet for writing, etc. Sometimes, when we use collaborative writing work, it is another alternative to different assessments. Although it may reduce the assessment efficiency when considering individual contribution or performance, it still provides positive evaluation values, like collaboration, generic skills, or minimized learning differences. Also, it also used the assessment as learning in order to evaluate students' learning performance (i.e., language proficiency, language capabilities, especially comprehension of vocabulary, managing vocabulary use, writing language expression, etc.). The format of using the worksheet and individual writing performance are good for referencing. To face the educational technology advancement and revolution of educational transformation, concepts of gamification, applying different educational games, and implementing game-based learning are very common, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Gamification refers to the use of gameplay and emphasis to promote users (like participants and students) in the activity (Groh et al., 2012; Wood & Reiners, 2015). Also, from educators' perspectives, games should be incorporated with the instruction design. For example, it can achieve ideas of “players engaging in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome” (Salen & Zimmermann, 2003, p. 96). Also, gamification can provide a game mechanism, detail the game's working mechanism, and offer

a time of playing in a fun and enjoyable experience. For a simple understanding of gamification, it is a combination of components between building good interaction dynamics behaviors with the supporting key operation processes intention (Werbach & Hunter, 2012). Gamification indeed changes people's particular and specific activities. Also, it can provide you with supporting fun and greater engagement in doing different tasks or things. Gamification refers to the user or participants. The gamification and game mechanism (i.e., gamification) only exist to ensure the strong sense of happiness, enthusiasm, and niceness to play, which are game mechanisms in a gamified system that merely exist to ensure a strong sense of fun, passion, and play that is fixed within the system (Deloitte, 2012). It can also enhance the learning interest (i.e, breaking down our own boring and dull stereotypes of playing games within class time (HK01 News, 2022) and learning satisfaction (Sailer et al., 2017).

Gamification Remarks

- Instruction design of Educational Games
- Game Elements and Reward Mechanism
- Games Characteristics and Educators' Perspectives

Table 2
Checklist of Successful Incorporating Educational Games (Wood & Reiners, 2015)

Gamification Characteristics	Explanation
1. Badges: Successful and Achievement (or Accomplishment)	It can provide certificate and reward mechanism (i.e, token economy)
2. Leaderboards: Managing how to get a success	It can incorporate after the educational games and count the best quick finish time with correct rate face-to-face format
3. Quests or managing tasks (beware challenges) with the objectives (e.g., waypoints or milestones)	It is very important to provide appropriate and proper tasks with suitable difficulties.
4. Making as a competition	It can be set up as a competition if educators or social workers want to.
5. Virtual Goods, Gifts or Token Economy	Optional
6. Gifts/ Transaction	Optional
7. Level of difficulties	The difficulty setting should follow the general instructional lesson plan design and considering the learning diversity of students. Due to recap purposes, it is recommended the difficulties from easy to difficult.

8. Collaboration, cooperation, how to consider the team, individual or group format	It can make collaboration tasks.
9. Feedback	Padlet should be offered with the feedback. It can be provided by educators (or social workers, or parents if the game promotes home version). Feedbacks are given in the formal (like the self-assessment, peer evaluation or guidance checking), or verbal.
10. Ownership, contribution, team and group	Everyone participating should play the games as the contribution.
11. Progress, and progress bar	Optional
12. Stochastic elements, where randomness and chance provide a sense of uncertainty and fun	Optional

Implications to Educators and Social Worker (Recommendation)

It is recommended to apply blended learning, together with face-to-face and online teaching and learning. It can incorporate immersive media with traditional pedagogy and provide support materials (instructions, user guides, practice exercises) to reinforce learning. This research paper is a human-centered and practical research-based approach to explore more immersive learning environments and game-based learning in primary English education. To align with clear learning objectives and iterative design with games, the research can emphasize the accessibility, assessment, and teaching and learning in the Hong Kong Primary Education Curriculum. It is highly recommended that educators and social workers consider the flexible and comprehensive assessment evaluation. From a game designer's and planner perspective, games can be applied at home, and parents or adults can become instructors or facilitators to provide support without classroom settings. Simultaneously, teacher and learner capacity-building and attempts to develop technological innovation that translates into meaningful and measurable gains for diverse learners. Social workers can use it as a revision tool or discover students' learning capabilities issues and further support them.

Summary and Future Study

Eventually, educational games will indeed be a proactive, viable, and motivating approach to primary English language learning, with clear avenues for optimization. The original topic, sourced from the master capstone project, emphasized primary English education professional competencies, pedagogical implications, and future directions for research and practice. Rather than foregrounding individual experience, the discussion situates the work within broader discourses on digital learning, immersive media, and equitable access in primary education. The whole project process emphasizes real-world application, and participants' research outcome aligns with practice-oriented roles in education and social services, where evidence-based, scalable, and suitable solutions are increasingly valued.

More scholars want to discuss and explore more about cognitive and metacognitive skills, reducing extraneous cognitive load, fostering critical and creative thinking and analytical skills and helping students improve their concentration, problem-solving capabilities, emotional intelligence, psychological resilience, and self-discipline. Also, more creative and innovative education pedagogies and approaches can be incorporated.

Limitations

To consider different group dynamics, I think it is essential for the primary school students to be the main participants and care for the behavior and symbolic interactions during playing games. From a pre-social worker perspective, we would like to care whether students are fully engaged in the game (to achieve the learning goals and attain the standard of flow theory). Also, we can assess students' spiritual and mental health (how they perceive emotions and feelings and whether they can perform in a different and extreme way). Also, it is very essential to observe the game-playing nature and experience of the users. For example, whether they have a sense of curiosity or competitiveness. Whether they can have the group process, group cohesion, and distribution of the group member and role well. It is very important to have more encouragement in order to ensure the desired learning outcomes. Our design of Primary English games not only covers the use of educators and within lessons but also covers the use of parents and without classroom time. Therefore, I think it can see different relationships and rapport. I think it also considers how to operate and maintain relationships. Perhaps educational games combined with the digital storytelling, narratives, and storylines. It can have more engagement and participation in the games. It can encourage adequate opportunities for primary students to deliver and draft their own ideas. Additionally, it provides authentic and real-time feedback, allowing students to facilitate learning strategies (Bonk et al., 2002; Dalsgaard & Godsk, 2007; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). To consider more absorbing, engaging, and immersive environments, the Unity Platform with coding 3D games should be customizable, related to diverse learning styles and preferences, and stimulating educational experiences. Eventually, it can provide self-efficacy, which promotes students' confidence and own abilities (Illi & Elhassouny, 2025; Li & Yu, 2023; Thango, 2024).

Acknowledgement

This research I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants contribution to our research study. We thank all the people who contribute and wrote previous versions of this document. I also specially thank for Dr. Lam Lap Kwan Alex, Lecturer I, and Dr. Hengky “Hank” Susanto guest lecturer at Department of Curriculum and instruction, The Education University of Hong Kong for professional advice. Also, I am thank for Mr. Leung, Kin Sang Taddy from Student Affair Office (SAO), The Education University of Hong Kong and among EDUHK Learning Buddies Team Member, voluntary participants 2024/2025 and Tai Po Hong Kong Children and Youth Services (Jockey Club Tai Po Integrated Children and Youth Service Centre) Social Worker and Staff to coordinate the initial pilot study and practical advice. This research is also awarded as the Level 3 Creative Lesson Plan Design in Creative Teaching Review Program under the Creative Teachers Association CTA) Limited. This research also acknowledges awards.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that this paper used Grammarly, Grammar-checking writing softwares/ functions (like EDUHK ChatGPT, Grok AI, POE, perplexity.ai, and QuillBot) to have proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical, spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-generated technologies were used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

Funding

This research study received no both external and internal funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Participant Consent Statement

All participants gave and provided their verbal or formal consent and participated in the study voluntarily.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Counterfactual Imaginations, Symbolism, and Poetic Language as Part of Populist and Manipulative Rhetoric

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Our research is part of a broader project focusing on manipulative representations in times of crisis and the analysis of linguistic strategies used to spread alternative truths in the public sphere. Culture and poetic language are among the less explored topics in political and opinion-forming rhetoric disseminated via the internet and social media. Based on a collected text corpus from online magazines objectively identified as alternative media in German-speaking countries, we will attempt a linguistic and cultural analysis of the key images, symbols, and overall poetic language used to convey alternative or manipulative narratives. We first process the analyzed corpus using corpus analysis methods and techniques and the Sketch Engine tool (identification of keywords and collocations); second, we combine this with a critical discourse analysis approach; and third, we focus on the analysis of poetic language using literary criticism. The aim is to highlight the typical elements of the language and rhetoric in question and thus help to better understand its functioning and ability to persuasively influence recipients. Such disclosure of typical linguistic and argumentative structures and their overlap with the aesthetic level can contribute to sensitizing the perception of these phenomena and to the better development of critical thinking in civil society.

Keywords: engaged poetry, Manova, corpus analysis, linguistic manipulation, literary analysis

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Introduction

This study is part of a larger research project in which we examine the phenomenon of manipulative representations in times of crisis in the German- and Slovak-speaking countries. In this context, we have so far analyzed various aspects of conspiracy discourse. In our research, we have focused primarily on political language and alternative media, with particular emphasis on identifying specific characteristics of conspiracy discourse and the linguistic strategies used in the dissemination and instrumentalization of conspiracy theories and alternative truths (see, e.g., Demčišák, 2024; Demčišák, 2025; Fraštíková, 2024; Fraštíková, 2025; Schuppener, 2025, and many others). Both in our analyses and in the existing research literature on this phenomenon in general, little attention is paid specifically to poetic language. This may be because literary and poetic language is not primarily associated with conspiracy discourse, and because this language is granted, a priori, an artistic and creative license that shifts it into the realm of the fictional, where non-factual narration is even directly presupposed.

However, the corpus we analyzed contains evidence showing that poetic language and poetry can become a self-chosen form of expression within alternative discourse. Specifically, we can demonstrate this using the example of the online magazines Rubikon and Manova, which feature a literature section and maintain an independent "Literature Salon" column. Since March 2021, the literary editorial team has also been running the "Poetry Corner," which continues to the present day. In our analysis, we focus primarily on texts published between 2021 and 2023; in total, there are 23 "Poetry Corners" from this period, containing texts by at least 35 authors, including some anonymous works and texts written under pseudonyms. Overall, we approach the analyzed text material from three perspectives—from the perspective of quantitative corpus analysis and collocations, from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, and from the perspective of literary studies and literary criticism.

An Approach Based on Word Frequency and Collocation Analysis

When we examine the analyzed corpus of poetic texts from the perspective of corpus analysis and look, for example, at the 50 most frequent nouns (see Figure 1), we find that, unlike texts that are primarily political in nature and originate from newspaper sections on politics, society, media, etc., they contain far fewer flagship and stigma words that might be typical of a populist conspiracy discourse. As such, words like *war*, *apparatus*, *fear*, *control*, *enemy*, *power* (stigma words) or *freedom*, *peace* (flagship words) can be partially identified. Instead, the discourse is dominated by terms that we might, in a certain sense, describe as philosophical – such as *human*, *time*, *world*, *God*, *death*, *heart*, *spirit*, *happiness*, *soul*, *love*, *light*, *word*. There is a predominance of abstract and transcendent concepts that relate to the grand and eternal themes of human life and can inspire reflection. However, this preference may also suggest a certain pathos.

We gain further insight by examining the collocations of these seemingly neutral words. Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the linguistic contexts of the three most common terms: *human* (Figure 2), *time* (Figure 3), and *life* (Figure 4).

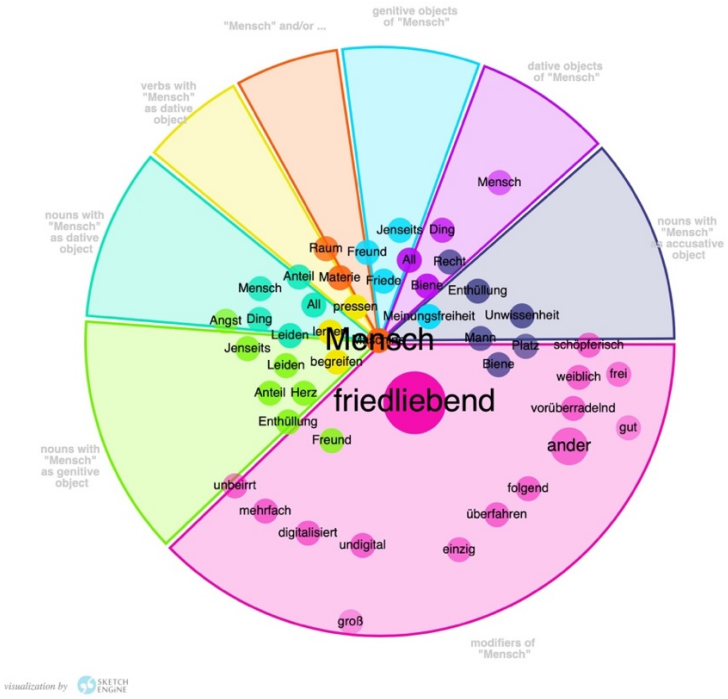
Figure 1
50 Most Frequent Nouns in the Corpus[1]

SKETCH ENGINE

noun (3,276 items | 6,741 total frequency)

Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun
1 Mensch	11 Tag	21 Freiheit	31 Sinn	41 Geist
2 Zeit	12 Gott	22 Kontrolle	32 Herz	42 Vater
3 Leben	13 Auge	23 Weg	33 Bild	43 Hund
4 Welt	14 Freund	24 Kopf	34 Junge	44 Staat
5 Kind	15 Ende	25 Blick	35 Ding	45 Wort
6 Krieg	16 Tod	26 Liebe	36 Mann	46 Seele
7 Frieden	17 Geschichte	27 Land	37 Macht	47 Natur
8 Friede	18 Haus	28 Körper	38 Licht	48 Kraft
9 Hand	19 Angst	29 Glück	39 Feind	49 Stimme
10 Apparat	20 Jahr	30 Gedicht	40 Gesicht	50 Volk

Figure 2
Collocations of the Word "Human"



[1] English translation of the most frequent nouns: 1 human, 2 time, 3 life, 4 world, 5 child, 6 war, 7 peace (Frieden), 8 peace (Friede), 9 hand, 10 apparatus, 11 day, 12 God, 13 eye, 14 friend, 15 end, 16 death, 17 history, 18 house, 19 fear, 20 year, 21 freedom, 22 control, 23 path, 24 head, 25 gaze, 26 love, 27 country, 28 body, 29 happiness, 30 poem, 31 meaning, 32 heart, 33 image, 34 boy, 35 thing, 36 man, 37 power, 38 light, 39 enemy, 40 face, 41 mind, 42 father, 43 dog, 44 state, 45 word, 46 soul, 47 nature, 48 strength, 49 voice, 50 people.

Figure 3
Collocations of the Word "Time"

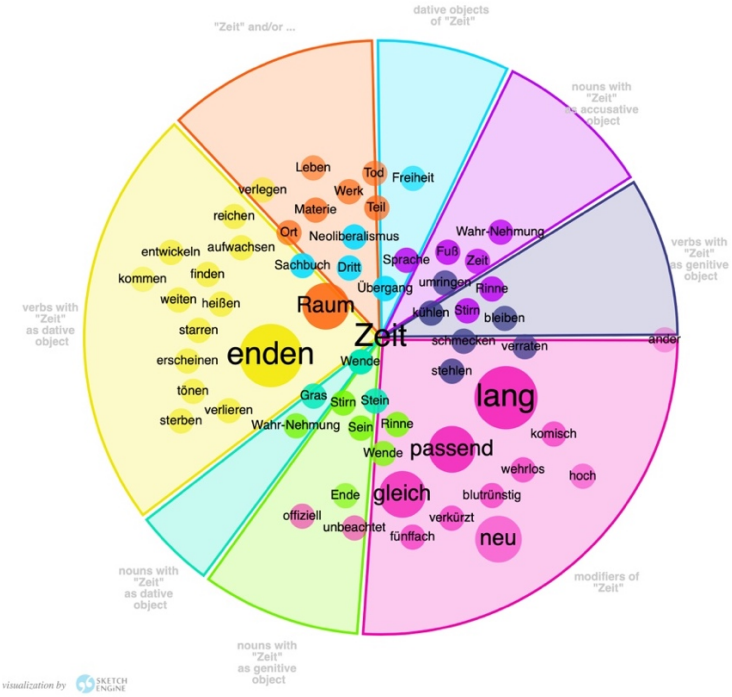
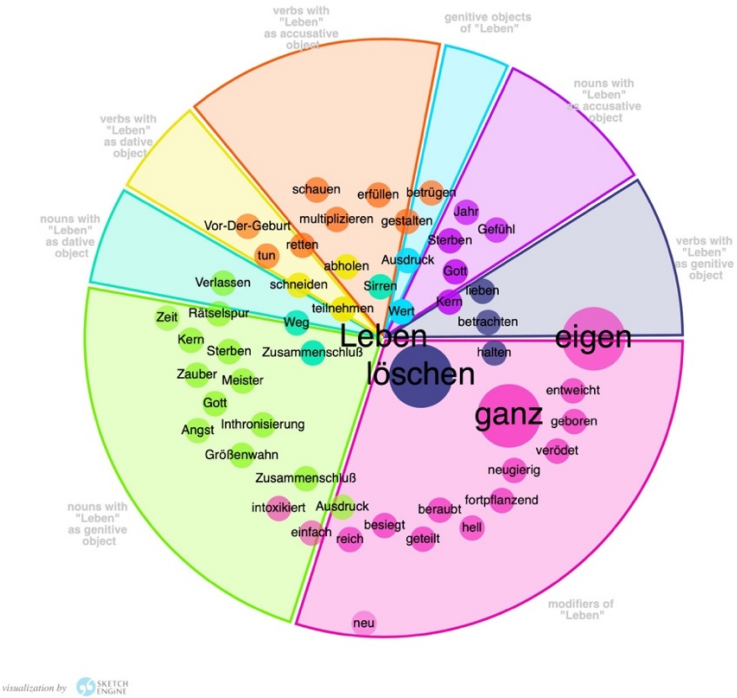


Figure 4
Collocations of the Word "Life"



The context surrounding the word *human* includes, on the one hand, positive attributes such as peace-loving, good, and free, as well as nouns like *friend* or *heart*. However, the *human* is also associated with many terms that point to human struggle and inner conflict – such as *suffering*, *fear*, *ignorance*, and *straining*. Humans are confronted with *space*, *matter*, and *objects* as well as with the *afterlife*, *machines*, and *digitalization*. This prototype of humanity is at the same time *different* from other humans; it moves between *ignorance* and *revelation*; it must *learn* and *understand* in order to ultimately remain *unwavering*. In connection with *time*, further negative perceptions follow—time is associated with terms such as *strange*, *defenseless*, *bloodthirsty*, *shortened*, *betrayed*, *enclosed*, etc. Yet it is also a time of *transition*, of *change*, of *neoliberalism*. Together with concepts such as *life*, *death*, *freedom*, and *end*, a philosophical dimension opens up, though again with a more negative connotation. This is also confirmed by a look at the collocations of the term *life* – life is *erased*, it *slips away*, it becomes *desolate*, one is *robbed of life*, and other expressions such as *cut*, *betray*, and *intoxicated* can correspond to a nihilistic and lamenting worldview. Humanity and its life are at the mercy of megalomania, fear, dying, and abandonment.

Figure 5
The 20 Most Frequent Multi-word Terms[2]



	Term
1	friedliebender Mensch
2	Einzelhaft als Knecht
3	Tod des Apparates
4	Mittel des Tötens
5	Diktatur der Macht
6	Ration Heldenmut
7	arabische Raubgesellschaft
8	manifestierte Angst
9	Knecht in Feigheit
10	Anmaßung zur Macht

The contrast and prevalence of negative connotations are also evident in the most frequent multi-word terms identified by the SketchEngine tool using the German Web 2023 (deTenTen23) reference corpus (see Figure 5). Although the term *peace-loving person* ranks first – from whom a *ration of heroism* is expected (position 6) – the other word combinations increasingly suggest that the individual is at the mercy of a power apparatus or the *dictatorship of power*. He is also repeatedly referred to as a *servant*. These recurring aspects of power are best examined from the perspective of critical discourse analysis.

[2] English translation of the most frequent multi-word terms: 1 peace-loving human, 2 solitary confinement as servant, 3 death of the apparatus, 4 means of killing, 5 dictatorship of power, 6 ration of heroism, 7 Arab predatory society, 8 manifested fear, 9 servant in cowardice, 10 presumption to power.

An Approach From the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis

In the next section, we will examine the analyzed corpus in greater detail and look at the contexts in which the most frequent words and keywords appear. In doing so, we will combine quantitative corpus analysis with critical discourse analysis. As Kutter (2018, p. 177) notes, quantitative corpus analysis takes a conceptually selective approach, emphasizes the individual word as the carrier of meaning, and views context more as a statistically defined co-text. In the next step, we will therefore expand on the purely statistical aspect by incorporating a more comprehensive contextual analysis. Let's take a look, for example, at the first most frequent multi-word term that appears in the poem *Kennst du Frieden?* (English: Do You Know Peace?) by Barbara Hindenes (see Figure 6):

Figure 6
Poem "Do You Know Peace?" by Barbara Hindenes

Ist Friede, wenn friedliebende Menschen in Konflikte hineingezogen werden?
Ist Friede, wenn friedliebende Menschen ihrer Meinungsfreiheit,
ihrer Menschen- und Bürgerrechte und ihrer Privatsphäre beraubt werden?
Ist Friede, wenn friedliebende Menschen die Unwissenheit, die
Täuschungsmanöver und die Gewalt von Mächtigen offenlegen und
deshalb zum Schweigen gebracht werden?
Ist wirklich Friede, wenn friedliebende Menschen zu Feinden
deklariert und zu Ausgestoßenen gemacht werden?
Ist Friede, wenn friedliebende Menschen getötet werden? (Hindenes 2022)

Is it peace when peace-loving people are drawn into conflicts?
Is it peace when peace-loving people are deprived of their freedom of speech,
their human and civil rights, and their privacy?
Is it peace when peace-loving people expose the ignorance,
deception, and violence of those in power and
are silenced as a result?
Is it truly peace when peace-loving people are declared enemies
and made into outcasts?
Is it peace when peace-loving people are killed? (translation)

Note. English translation by the author.

Central to these rhetorical questions is the dialogic structure initiated by the poem's title between the lyrical subject and an addressed "you." Both belong to the group of peace-loving people who stand in opposition to the violence of the powerful. The peace-loving people are drawn into conflicts, deprived of their freedom of speech and their rights, silenced, ostracized, and even killed. This confrontation contradicts the idea of peace and gives rise to a polarization and dichotomization typical of populist discourse. It is underpinned by further binary oppositions; an epistemic hierarchy emerges between "us" and "them," whereby both groups are morally charged (as good or evil), and the discourse employs a strategy of inclusion and exclusion. The contribution of critical discourse analysis lies, in particular, in highlighting the linguistic and discursive nature of social power relations (Forchtner & Wodak, 2018, p. 136). From the perspective of the communicative level, peace-loving people are drawn into conflicts, deprived of their freedom of expression and their rights, silenced, ostracized, and even killed. The subject's bias toward portraying themselves in a positive light and others in a negative light is one of the general strategies of manipulative discourse (van Dijk 2018, p. 227). The

addressed subject is also positioned as an awakened and knowledgeable being and, as a resistant subject, acquires a new identity. We see something similar in the next poem:

Figure 7
Poem "Just Two Years Later" by Rudolph Bauer

und wohin ist der mensch verschollen	and where has the human being disappeared to?
wer hatte ihn zum knecht gemacht	who made him a servant?
zum knecht der obrigkeit	a servant of authority
zum folterknecht sodann	then a servant of torture
vom nekrophoben ängstlichen	from a fearful necrophobe
zum nekrophilen todesschwadroneur	to a necrophilic squadroneur of death
verlasst den kreislauf	break free from the cycle
rebelliert	rebel
zerreißt den totenschein (Bauer 2022)	tear up the death certificate (Bauer 2022)

Note. English translation by the author.

The subject is to be roused from his passivity; once awakened, he is no longer the sleeper and the obedient one, but rather offers resistance that can even overcome death. The cited examples, as well as the keywords and collocations of the most frequent words, show that affect-related terms such as fear, death, control, and freedom are often employed; these are further reinforced through multiple repetitions, which is linked to the strategy of emotionalization and affect regulation.

The central terms can sometimes be reinterpreted and recoded (reframing); as a rule, positive or neutral expressions are often shifted into negative ones (e.g., banks become churches, solidarity becomes coercion, or science becomes religion), but re-semantization can also occur in the opposite direction, as the following poem by Rudolph Bauer demonstrates (see Figure 8).

The poem "Venceremos—Victory," which references the Spanish protest song "Venceremos," takes up the central idea of "We will prevail." However, it reinterprets the meaning of the concept of victory. From a linguistic and philosophical perspective, this can be understood as the idea that every word simultaneously resonates with its own differentiality and oppositions to other words. In this case, the meaning of the word "victory" depends on its opposites, such as defeat, enemy, death, destruction, and skeleton. The lyrical collective subject "we," however, reflects on these resonating meanings, seeks to free itself from uniform thinking, and associates the concept of victory with blossoming, tulips, gentian flowers, happiness, friendship, humanity, God, and the future. The line of thought moves from comparisons with nature toward abstraction. "We" becomes the mouthpiece of God and the future. In this way, a new reality is constructed. This is made explicit by the reflection that reality can be discursively created and also discursively recreated, which means that in this attempt, the official discourse can be delegitimized. In the course of this, new metaphors are also created as ideological tools. These approaches can be interpreted as typical of populist and conspiracy-theoretic linguistic strategies.

Figure 8
Poem "Venceremos Victories" by Rudolph Bauer

wenn wir erklären	When we declare
wir werden siegen	that we will triumph,
sprechen wir nicht	we are not speaking
von militärischen siegen	of military victories
und den niederlagen	or the defeats
unserer feinde	of our enemies
unsere siege blühen	Our triumphs bloom
auf wie holländische	like Dutch
tulpen wie blauer	tulips, like blue
enzian ohne gewalt	gentian—without violence,
ohne leichenskelett	without corpses,
und zerstörung	and without destruction
dass ein wort wie sieg	that a word like "victory"
die niederlagen anderer	means the defeats of others
bedeutet zeigt | wie	shows | how
schwarz das denken noch	deeply entrenched such thinking still
in uniformen steckt	in uniforms
gehorsam und befehl	obedience and command
unsere siege sind	our victories are
waffenlos gewaltfrei	unarmed, nonviolent
und himmlisch	and heavenly
beseitigt durch sie	through them
werden die sorgen	the sorrows
der armen der welt	of the world's poor
sagen wir freude	let us say joy
statt siege | sagen wir	instead of victories | let us say
freundschaft und	friendship and
glück | liegen wir uns	happiness | let us lie
in den armen | lasst	in each other's arms |let us
menschheit uns sein	be humanity
wenn wir von siegen	when we speak of victories
sprechen spricht	a god speaks
aus uns ein gott	from within us
spricht zukunft	speaks of the future
leben aus uns | kein	of life from within us | no
feindbild kein tod (Bauer 2022)	enemy image, no death (translation)

Note. English translation by the author.

In general, the analyzed texts can be described as highly reflexive, reflecting a keen sensitivity to social discourses. This can also be confirmed by looking at the most frequently occurring verbs in the corpus (see Figure 9). Among the 50 most frequent verbs are expressions such as *say*, *see*, *hear*, *think*, *know*, *believe*, *speak*, *write*, *mean*, *recognize*, *name*, *tell*, *understand*, *learn*, and *comprehend*, all of which are associated with cognitive abilities. Reality and discourse are not merely reflected upon and perceived; rather, they are viewed with the aim of interpreting them in accordance with one's own worldview, as well as changing and reinterpreting them.

Figure 9
50 Most Frequent Verbs in the Corpus



verb (1,250 items | 5,088 total frequency)

Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb
1 sein	11 lassen	21 bleiben	31 tun	41 erzählen
2 werden	12 sollen	22 nehmen	32 leben	42 fallen
3 haben	13 machen	23 sprechen	33 sterben	43 verstehen
4 können	14 stehen	24 finden	34 brauchen	44 lernen
5 geben	15 hören	25 liegen	35 schreiben	45 verlieren
6 kommen	16 denken	26 bringen	36 tanzen	46 zeigen
7 sagen	17 wissen	27 mögen	37 meinen	47 setzen
8 sehen	18 wollen	28 stellen	38 suchen	48 schaffen
9 gehen	19 glauben	29 dürfen	39 erkennen	49 begreifen
10 müssen	20 halten	30 ziehen	40 nennen	50 tragen

In addition to attempting to critique and shift prevailing discourses, new discourses of their own are also created, presenting alternative scenarios and establishing hypothetical causalities. This occurs not only in the actual poetic texts of the *Poetry Corner*, but also in the paratext, which interprets and contextualizes the presented and published texts, as in this example:

Figure 10
Text "From Head to Heel" by Daniel Sandmann

> *Ich denke, es gibt, das ganze Corona-Geschehen betreffend, nicht nur einen Hauptfaktor oder ein Hauptziel. Das denkbare ‚Ziel' eines absichtlichen Menschheitsreduktionsprogramms könnte ebenso eine sogenannte Nebenwirkung, ein Kollateralschaden sein, der ebenso leicht und auch gern hingenommen wird, da er sich mit andern Zielen und Motiven verschränkt, wie wir es sehen — alle Vorsichtsmaßnahmen fehlen, alle Aufklärungsversuche bleiben aus: Dann wäre es schlicht der Sieg des Faschismus als Grundhaltung, was ja eh nicht fern liegt. Ein ebenso denkbares ‚Ziel' ist die absolut totale Profit-Schürfung anlässlich dieser außergewöhnlichen Gelegenheit, wenn die gesamte — überlebende — Weltbevölkerung immer wieder vielfach geimpft und geboostet werden kann und immer neue ‚Mutanten' aus den Ärmeln geschüttelt werden.* (Sandmann 2021b)
>
> I think that, when it comes to the whole Coronavirus situation, there isn't just one main factor or one main goal. The conceivable "goal" of a deliberate program to reduce the human population could just as easily be a so-called side effect, collateral damage, which is just as readily and willingly accepted because it intertwines with other goals and motives, as we see—all precautions are lacking, all attempts at clarification are absent: Then it would simply be the triumph of fascism as a fundamental attitude, which is not far-fetched anyway. An equally conceivable 'goal' is the absolute, total pursuit of profit on the occasion of this extraordinary opportunity, when the entire—surviving—world population can be repeatedly vaccinated and boosted many times over, and ever-new 'variants' are pulled out of thin air. (translation)

Note. English translation by the author.

The introductory text to Poetry Corner IV by Daniel Sandmann outlines a nightmare scenario involving a program to eliminate humanity. At the same time, it draws causal links to the greed and profit-seeking of the pharmaceutical industry and to the notion that vaccinated people will turn into mutants. These words correspond to common patterns of conspiracy theory discourse;

they suggest hidden agendas of the elites and an orchestrated reality and construct hypothetical causes and effects.

The content of the published poems also belongs to this conspiracy discourse. For example, texts by Lisa Danilova (see Figure 11) and Ian Folko Ressisch (see Figure 12) also address medical discourse and the topic of vaccination.

Figure 11
Poem "Disease" by Lisa Danilova

Sagt mir des Doktors tiefe Stimme	The doctor's deep voice tells me
Es ist nicht das, wofür du's hältst	It's not what you think it is
Sieh zu! Dich täuschen deine Sinne	Take care! Your senses are deceiving you
Und schützen tue ich dich vor deiner selbst	And I'm protecting you from yourself
[...]	[…]
Glück gibt es nur noch aus der Spritze.	Happiness now comes only from the syringe.
An frischer Luft gibt's nur noch Atemnot.	Fresh air brings only shortness of breath.
Der Lebenssinn verbrennt in Fieberhitze.	The meaning of life burns in feverish heat.
Man lebt nicht. Man ist fast schon tot.	You don't live. You're almost dead.
(Danilova 2021)	(translation)

Note. English translation by the author.

Figure 12
Poem "Vaccination is Love" by Ian Folko Ressisch

Mehr Kontrolle und impfen! Impfen ist Liebe! Die Leine mal lockern und mal wieder straffen.

Sind wir gehorsam und fressen wir den rauen Knochen, den sie uns mit gewaschenen Händen hinhalten — so sagen sie — dann dürfen wir wieder leben!

Und ich glaube daran, dass man einen sicheren, ganz neuen Impfstoff in mehr als fünffach verkürzter Zeit entwickeln kann. Ich glaube, dass er hilft.

[...]

Es fühlt sich gut an, in den nächsten Lockdown einzutauchen und meinen Kindern zu erklären, dass ich das Richtige mache, wenn ich sie einsperre!

Ich bin jetzt konsequent naiv — und es fühlt sich einfach alles so alternativlos richtig an! (Ressisch 2021)

More control and vaccinations! Vaxination is love! Loosen the leash and then tighten it again.

If we're obedient and gulp down the raw bone they hold out to us with washed hands—so they say—then we'll be allowed to live again!

And I believe that a safe, brand-new vaccine can be developed in less than a fifth of the usual time. I believe it helps.

[…]

It feels good to dive into the next lockdown and explain to my children that I'm doing the right thing when I lock them up!

I'm being consistently naive now—and it all just feels so unquestionably right! (translation)

Note. English translation by the author.

Both attempt to delegitimize or ridicule the expert discourse. The authorities, expressed for example through the doctor's voice, are called into question; the lyrical subject is exposed to a sense of deception, though he believes he can see through it. Faced with this discourse, the subject is either helplessly at the mercy of the authorities and feels robbed of life, or it adopts the strategy of seemingly submitting to the pressure of the discourse in order to defeat it through irony and pretended naivety. In this inversion of thinking lies the subject's own strength and superiority.

The specific, conspiracy-based discourse of the analyzed texts is also characterized by interdiscursivity. Specifically, there is an intertwining of political, scientific, and religious discourse with everyday discourse. Furthermore, these layers of discourse are linked to poetic and aesthetic dialogue. For this reason, it seems appropriate to examine the texts from the perspective of literary studies and literary criticism as well.

An Approach From the Perspective of Literary Studies

It would be insufficient to examine this specific corpus, which consists of poetic texts, only from the perspective of linguistics and discourse analysis. Most of the poems analyzed belong to the genre of political poetry and can thus be situated within a particular literary tradition. We find political content as early as the Middle Ages (e.g., in the works of Walter von der Vogelweide), during the Reformation, in portrayals of the Thirty Years' War (e.g., Gryphisus), in the struggle for freedom during the period of the Enlightenment (e.g., Schubart, Schiller), in the Vormärz period or during the Weimar Republic, as well as in postwar literature (e.g., the late 1960s). In this context, we speak not only of political literature but also of socially engaged literature. The concept of socially engaged literature was defined on a theoretical level by figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Walter Benjamin, and writers across various literary periods have discussed the role of literature as an instrument for social change within the framework of their poetologies.

The concept of the "Poetry Corner," which appears as a special section of the literary editorial section of the magazine Rubikon and later Manova, can be described directly as a form of political engagement. The first "Poetry Corner" opens with the following words:

Figure 13
Text "Over Glowing Shards" by Daniel Sandmann

> *Wer politische Kritik übt, sich dabei aber der Sprachmuster bedient, die vom Gegner geprägt wurden, der tanzt noch immer nach deren Melodie. Wir müssen nicht nur die Strukturen der Macht überwinden, sondern auch ihr Bewusstsein, das sich in der Ausdrucksweise manifestiert. Der erste Schritt, um einer Gesellschaft den Spiegel vorzuhalten, ist somit der Schritt aus der Sprache heraus, die sie spricht. Nur aus diesem Abstand lässt sich verstehen, wie eine Gesellschaft funktioniert, wie die Machtkanäle verlaufen.* (Sandmann 2021a)
>
> Those who engage in political criticism but use the same language patterns shaped by their opponents are still dancing to their tune. We must overcome not only the structures of power, but also the mindset that manifests itself in language. The first step in holding up a mirror to society is therefore to step outside the language it speaks. Only from this distance can we understand how a society functions and how the channels of power operate. (translation)

Note. English translation by the author.

Poetic language is understood as a kind of counter-language and counter-discourse, which corresponds to Foucault's original conception of literary discourse. This perspective runs like a thread through the entire "Poetry Corner" section. Poetry is understood as a means to autonomy and human dignity, as a kind of salvation from the threatening future:

Figure 14
Text "The Signs Point to a Storm" by Daniel Sandmann

> *[...] gerade deshalb ist Poesie ein Mittel, Autonomie zu wahren. Würde. Raum für Machtkritik. Poetisches Schreiben als letzte Manifestation des Menschen, wie wir ihn gekannt haben und den zu opfern schwerfällt, angesichts dessen, was an seine Stelle zu treten droht ...* (Sandmann 2021b)
>
> […] precisely for this reason, poetry is a means of preserving autonomy. Dignity. A space for critiquing power. Poetic writing as the final manifestation of humanity as we have known it—and one that is difficult to sacrifice, given what threatens to take its place ... (translation)

Note. English translation by the author.

The central topic is language, which is viewed as a site of power and resistance. In this regard, poetry serves as a counter-space, a medium of insight, and a specific form of resistance. At the same time, it helps to expose reality as manipulated, controlled, and media generated.

The analyzed texts are characterized by an extreme heterogeneity of poetic registers and an uneven artistic level. The style ranges from catchphrases and agitation with short verses, simple syntax, and frequent repetitions, through satirical, parodic imitations of classical formulas (e.g., parodies of the national anthem or the Lord's Prayer), to an independent, vividly imaginative language and metaphorically rich poetry. The language is often paratactic, repetitive, and mantra-like. Everyday language is mixed with bureaucratic language, technical terminology, and natural vocabulary; hyperbole, irony, and parody are also strongly represented.

The texts analyzed construct a very specific lyrical subject. The "I" in Hindenes's text "Do You Know Peace" (see Figure 6), for example, is able to see the hidden truth and identify the contradiction between the official conception of peace and its supposedly real meaning. In Bauer's text "Just two years later" (see Figure 7) we witness a transformation of the subject from a passive victim to an opponent of the system and a fighter. The lyrical "I" often has privileged access to the truth and is correspondingly enlightened. This corresponds to the epistemic self-awareness typical of conspiracy narratives, which establishes the distinction between a knowledgeable and enlightened minority and the deceived majority. Symbolically, a kind of initiation and pseudo-religious revelation is constructed. The symbolism of awakening and revelation is among the oldest cultural archetypes. In the analyzed texts, it takes on a political function. Within this framework, knowledge and ignorance, waking and sleeping, freedom and subjugation, as well as truth and falsehood, are symbolically juxtaposed and imbued with ideological significance.

The metaphors and symbols used—such as screen, apparatus, machine, and algorithm—belong to the realm of technology and media. Here, the human being is understood as a controlled system and reality as a media construct. The next realm is represented by bodily metaphors (using terms such as skull, immune system, and cells). In poetic depictions, the human body becomes a site of power intervention; it is economized as a means of production or a bioreactor.

Nature is also closely linked to biopolitical imagery. Following the literary tradition, nature is portrayed in opposition to technology. The natural realm is represented by plants, earth, and roots, while the realm of technology is represented by fiber optics, microplastics, or mRNA. In this juxtaposition, technology is associated with alienation and invasion, whereas nature is associated with authenticity and healing. Finally, it is the use of disaster imagery—with terms like "inferno," "ruins," "flames," "war," and so on—that has a powerful emotional impact and leads to over-dramatization. Dystopian visions are frequently the subject of these depictions. However, these apocalyptic visions are also countered by religious symbolism. The work features an eschatological imagery that draws on concepts of death, doom, the end of time, destruction, but also salvation and the future. Contrary to what one might expect, religion does not offer a way out of the dystopia. Rather, the focus is on a critique of power. The aspects being criticized are sacralized and exposed as a false substitute religion (e.g., when banks are depicted as churches, or when there is talk of a "holy market"). Following the conspiracy-theory rhetoric, the analyzed poems portray various alternative realities, hypothetical scenarios, dreamlike and surreal scenes, or alternative historical timelines. Richardson (2012, p. 177) describes this type of narrative as antimimetic. The goal of antimimetic narratives is to challenge official accounts and present us with alternative worldviews, thereby revealing the unreality of conventional notions of order. In this way, hidden truths and concealed connections are revealed and brought to light.

Conclusion

Our partial analyses reveal a discourse formation with a strongly ideological structure, characterized by polarization and dichotomization, discursive subjectification, emotionalization and affect steering, counterfactual narratives, metaphorization, and reframing, among other features. The logic of populist discourse – whose central features include anti-elitism, moral dichotomies, and the homogenization of the people – is also encoded poetically and aesthetically. Some of the texts resemble political rhetoric, while others are characterized by greater poetic independence and refinement. The language is characterized by the contradiction between poetic condensation and imagery on the one hand, and the discursive adoption of political language on the other. It is evident that the analyzed texts can be described as engaged poetry; they demonstrate an explicit opposition to the state, the media, or science. They employ an appellative structure, draw upon the friend-foe dichotomy, and evoke a moral urgency. In this hybrid form between literature and political discourse, poetry functions, in a certain sense, as an autonomous and specific tool for shaping opinion and persuasion.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contract No. APVV-22-0221.

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Construction of Hsinchu Shrine in the Japanese Colonial Period: Focusing on the Matsushima Family

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study investigates the technical context and transnational construction process of Hsinchu Shrine during the Japanese colonial period through a semi-structured interview with Yoshitomo Matsushima, director of the Japan Architectural Craft Design Office. The research focuses on the Matsushima family, "*Miya-daiku*" (shrine carpenters) from Dazaifu, Fukuoka. It confirms that the master carpenters recorded on the Hsinchu Shrine munafuda—Matsushima Shigeru, Matsushima Sadayoshi, and Matsushima Yoshimitsu—were brothers. Originating from a barrel-making background, the family transitioned to shrine carpentry and established long-term collaborations with the Ashizu Workshop of Fukuoka and architect Sunami Takashi. During the approximately two-and-a-half-year construction period of Hsinchu Shrine, the male members of the family relocated to Taiwan as a group, managing both onsite technical execution and daily life necessities. By synthesizing oral history and archival documents, this research reconstructs the life histories of these craftsmen and illustrates the dynamic processes of technical organizations, labor mobility, and the flow of construction materials between Taiwan and Japan.

Keywords: Hsinchu Shrine, shrine architecture, *miya-daiku*, Matsushima family, Japanese colonial period

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Introduction

The Remains of Hsinchu Shrine and Its Attached Buildings, a municipal historic site in Hsinchu City, Taiwan, provide significant physical evidence of historical timber construction methodologies. While existing literature outlines the political history and spatial layout of the shrine, documentation regarding the specific builders and their technical lineages remains incomplete. Investigating these craftsmen is necessary to establish an empirical baseline for the ongoing first-phase restoration project and to document the technical parameters of the original construction.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To reconstruct the lineage and technical history of the Matsushima family, the *Miya-daiku* (shrine carpenters) responsible for building the Hsinchu Shrine.
2. To identify individual roles and trace cross-regional labor mobilization within the construction process.
3. To examine how their traditional craft adapted to post-war technical and environmental changes, thereby establishing the historical value of the shrine through the lens of architectural technology and providing an empirical reference for the restoration project.

Figure 1
Historical Photograph of Hsinchu Shrine



Source: National Diet Library

Research Methodology

This paper integrates oral history with archival verification. The primary source material was collected during an interview conducted on December 7, 2025, at the Japan Architectural Craft Design Office within the Jinja-Honcho in Tokyo. The informant, Mr. Matsushima Yoshitomo, is the son of Matsushima Yoshimitsu and the nephew of *Tōryō* (master carpenter) Matsushima Shigeru, and currently serves as the director of the office, maintaining direct access to family records, logs, and corporate archives. To verify the oral data, the testimonies were

systematically cross-referenced with the Hsinchu Shrine *munafuda*, historical construction photographs from the National Diet Library of Japan, and the corporate records of Arii Construction.

Research Findings and Discussion

Technical Evolution: From *Okeya* to *Miya-daiku*

The Matsushima family originally operated an *okeya* (barrel-making) workshop in Dazaifu, Fukuoka Prefecture. From the perspective of technological history, the transition from utilitarian vessel production to *Miya-daiku* was facilitated by shared tool proficiencies. The fabrication of watertight barrels required precise handling of the *kanna* (plane) and specialized techniques for shaping curved timber. Additionally, *okeya* work demanded exactness in processing *hanamono* (small decorative pieces or offcuts). This proficiency in extracting precise structural components from raw wood laid the technical foundation for executing complex joinery and sacred ornamentation.

The formal transition to shrine carpentry began with the patriarch, Tokutaro Matsushima, who secured maintenance work at the Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, establishing a specialized craft practice wherein all six of his sons trained as *Miya-daiku*. The family operated via a structured division of labor: the eldest son, Matsushima Shigeru, served as the *Tōryō*, managing the technical core, while the branch family provided administrative support through Tokuji Matsushima (Tokutaro's brother), who acted as the *Genba Dairinin* (site proxy). The lineage expanded its operations by working with the Ashizu Shaji Komusho, an organization founded by Kojiro Ashizu that funneled skilled Kyushu craftsmen into major regional construction projects.

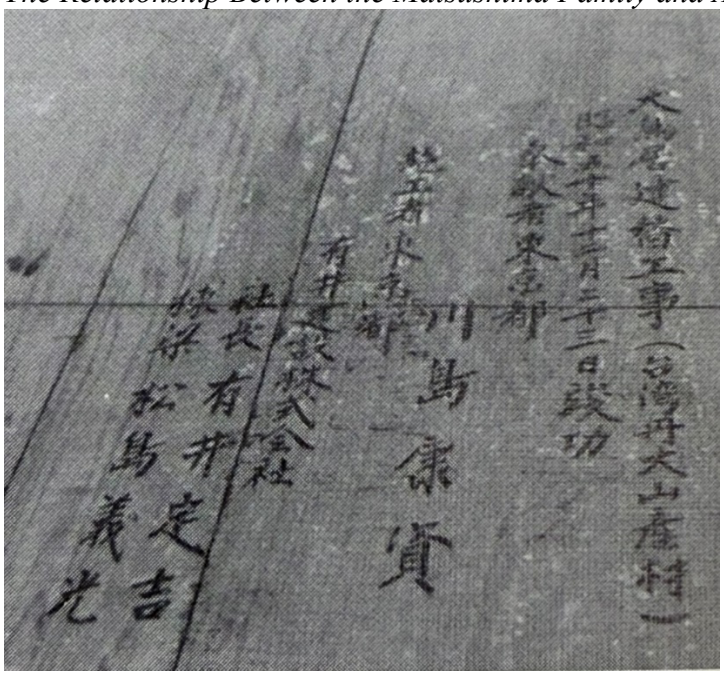
Onsite Roles and Craftsmanship at the Hsinchu Shrine

The construction of the second-phase Hsinchu Shrine (circa 1940) lasted approximately two and a half years. The extant *munafuda* confirms the collective mobilization of the family, explicitly listing three biological brothers whose roles reflected a clear generational hierarchy:

1. ***Matsushima Shigeru (Eldest Son):*** Served as the *Tōryō* and technical lead. He was approximately 52 years old and personally executed all major decorative carvings. His craftsmanship is characterized by *asobi* (artistic playfulness), visible in the deliberate asymmetrical design of the *gegyo* (gable pendants) at the *Ema-den* (votive picture hall), reflecting individual technical autonomy within a standardized framework.
2. ***Matsushima Sadayoshi (Fourth Son):*** Participated as an intermediate carpenter at approximately 25 years of age. He trained under his eldest brother and later moved to Tokyo, where he founded Arii Construction.
3. ***Matsushima Yoshimitsu (Fifth Son):*** Participated as a 15-year-old apprentice. Lacking advanced technical training at the time, he managed daily logistics, tool maintenance, and cooking. Despite his status as an apprentice, his presence was formally recorded on the *munafuda*, showcasing the operational reality of the traditional apprenticeship system.

During the project, only the male family members moved to Taiwan, maintaining a communal residential unit on-site while the female members remained in Kyushu.

Figure 2
The Relationship Between the Matsushima Family and Arii Kensetsu



Source: Mr. Yoshitomo Matsushima

Professional Networks and Post-war Material Continuity

The family maintained a long-term collaboration with Sunami Takashi, an architect of the Bureau of Shrines (*Jingi-in*). This professional relationship was underpinned by personal trust; Sunami reportedly stayed at Matsushima Shigeru's home during inspection tours of the Dazaifu Tenmangu. Sunami's architectural designs tended to emphasize plant and geometric motifs rather than elaborate animal carvings. This design preference appears to have corresponded well with the Matsushima family's technical expertise in fine timber detailing and *hanamono* craftsmanship.

In the post-war era, the fourth son, Sadayoshi, was adopted into the Arii family (renamed Sadakichi Arii) and established Arii Construction in Tokyo. Facing urban fire codes and timber shortages during the 1950s and 1960s, the firm collaborated with Sunami to translate the proportions and design logic of traditional timber structures into reinforced concrete (RC) architecture, completing the reconstruction of numerous modern shrines.

This network also facilitated a continuous cross-strait flow of construction materials. The lineage systematically documented the properties of Taiwan Hinoki (cypress), noting that its high oil content (*aburake*) provided superior decay resistance in humid climates, though it caused the wood surface to darken (*kurozumi*) over time by attracting dust. Arii Construction utilized Taiwan Hinoki for major post-war projects, including the reconstruction of the Second Torii of Meiji Jingu in 1965 using Alishan timber imported via Kawashima Zaimokuten (Kawashima Lumber), and the reconstruction of the Takekoma Inari Shrine in Sendai.

Conclusion

This study verifies that the three *Miya-daiku* recorded on the Hsinchu Shrine *munafuda* were brothers from the Dazaifu Matsushima family, establishing their lineage and technical

transition from *okeya* to shrine carpentry. The architectural features of the shrine, such as the asymmetrical *gegyo*, demonstrate how master builders exercised individual craftsmanship within standardized frameworks. Furthermore, the lineage's post-war transition to reinforced concrete structures and their continued use of Taiwan Hinoki underscore the continuity of this technical network. These findings provide a specific historical and material baseline to guide the current physical restoration of the Hsinchu Shrine.

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Visual Design of Emotion Cards: Content Validation of Emotion Colors and Facial Expressions

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The visual elements—such as text, color, and imagery—on emotion cards used by helping professionals significantly influence client projection and expression during sessions, thereby impacting the efficacy and outcomes of the counseling process. This study developed two distinct prototypes designed for counseling purposes: “Color Cards,” which convey emotion solely through color, and “Facial Expression Cards,” which feature facial graphics. Both sets contain an identical number of cards and share the same emotion vocabulary. To evaluate whether the visual designs align with users' cognitive perception of emotions, a content validation was conducted focusing on emotion vocabulary, color application, and facial expression design. A total of 91 and 92 participants, respectively, evaluated the two sets. The validation process involved participants interacting with physical cards and providing feedback on their perceptions and design suggestions through one-on-one questionnaires and interviews. The results indicate the following: (1) The initial set included 62 emotion terms; based on participant feedback, 7 new terms were added and 3 were removed, resulting in a final total of 66 terms. (2) The color application and facial expression designs generally aligned with user cognition. Ultimately, only 11 cards required specific design adjustments: 5 from the Color Cards and 6 from the Facial Expression Cards. Furthermore, the “Facial Expression Cards” demonstrated a higher overall acceptance rate by users. This study establishes two sets of emotion cards suitable for the counseling field. Helping professionals may reference these findings and utilize the developed cards to assess the emotional states of their clients.

Keywords: emotion cards, color, facial expression, content validation

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Introduction

Being able to recognize facial emotions in others is a necessary ability for understanding and establishing complex social concepts (Baron-Cohen, 2002; Thomas & Jordan, 2004). Visual image tools like cards help individuals recognize and express emotions (Kuo & Chang, 2010). For example, UNO color cards can be used to connect with personal emotions for therapeutic purposes (Drew et al., 2007). It was mentioned in Conallen and Reed (2016) that expression cards are widely used in emotional education, with benefits verified by relevant research; cards featuring basic emotion categories help clients develop the ability to recognize others' emotions in different situations (Conallen & Reed, 2012).

Schimmel and Jacobs (2011) believe that creative counseling techniques (such as cards) can help clients integrate visual, auditory, and tactile elements to complete the therapeutic process. The visual content on cards (such as images, text, colors) affects clients' projection or expression (Chiang & Chen, 2008; Drew et al., 2007), potentially influencing the smoothness and outcomes of the counseling process. Looking at color factors alone, research shows that color influences people's affective judgments (Briki & Hue, 2016) and impacts emotions (Akers et al., 2012). If the card design lacks visual design guidelines or if the use of images, text, or colors doesn't match the general public's cognition or impressions of emotions, the use of cards might cause clients to experience omissions, confusion, or bewilderment during the counseling process. How to systematically research and design cards presents an opportunity for designers to contribute.

The researcher has worked with teachers specializing in counseling and guidance through other projects; it was indirectly discovered that most psychological counselors own multiple card decks, and indirectly found that: (1) clients sometimes cannot resonate with the visual content on the cards, making it difficult for them to select cards that match their personal situations during counseling; (2) the content of all card decks isn't completely consistent, and sometimes requiring different decks to compensate for missing elements; (3) designers project their personal experiences into card design, sometimes prioritizing aesthetics over emotional theory, which doesn't always align with the general public's understanding.

The researcher conducted a preliminary investigation of “emotion cards” and found that these cards are mostly created by professionals with psychological expertise and practical experience. However, it was also discovered that emotion cards used for high school students and above indeed have inconsistencies in emotional terminologies and card quantities. Card content and design may affect the counseling process and outcomes. Where design expertise can provide assistance, it should improve the effectiveness of card usage.

In summary, this research focuses on emotion cards, designing and producing actual cards to verify whether design criteria are complete, and evaluating the appropriateness of card visual design through content validation. The researcher's 2022 research was focused on establishing visual design criteria for emotion cards. This study, which builds on the 2022 research, invites users to validate the visual design criteria of emotion cards, with research objectives listed as follows:

1. Conducting content validation and analysis with the general public regarding visual design criteria, including validation of emotion color and facial expression design.
2. Proposing modification suggestions for visual design criteria of emotion cards.

Literature Review

Emotion

Goleman (2009) defined emotions as: "feelings, specific thoughts, physiological and psychological states, and related behavioral tendencies" (Chang, 2016). Emotions affect human cognition, feelings, learning, communication, and decision-making judgment (Dubey et al., 2014). Knowing how to recognize one's emotional state can help individuals sense experiences, understand their inner needs, and take action (Greenberg, 2004). Schreier (2002) believes that emotional control and utilization stem from an individual's ability to first self-recognize emotional states, including awareness of emotional elements and categories, as well as emotional processes.

There are mainly two theories of emotion classification. One is categorical perception, meaning dividing emotions into different types (Biehl et al., 1997; Calder et al., 1996; Ekman, 1999; Goleman, 2009; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). The researcher has compiled relevant literature in Table 1.

Table 1
Compilation of Literature on Emotional Categorical Perception

Literature Content	Data Source
Emotional quotient (EQ) classified emotions into eight categories: Love, happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and shame.	Goleman (2009)
Dividing emotions into the following: positive emotions and negative emotions.	Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002)
This is currently the most widely cited classification standard. It is believed that humans have evolved at least six basic emotions for adaptation and survival: happiness, anger, sadness, fear, disgust, and surprise.	Ekman (1999)
When using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) for facial expression image coding, there are seven emotions included: anger, contempt, fear, happiness, sadness, disgust, and surprise. Each emotion has eight images, totaling 56 images.	Biehl et al. (1997)
Dividing emotions into four types: happiness, sadness, fear, and anger.	Calder et al. (1996)

Source: Compiled by this research (2024)

Another method of emotion classification adopts dimensional perception where emotions are considered as continuous processes and degree changes, and emotions are presented using two-dimensional or three-dimensional spatial methods (Russell, 1980; Tarasenko, 2010; Thayer, 1989; Wu et al., 2013; Table 2). Some scholars believe that emotion classification involves both categorical perception and dimensional perception, rather than just a single classification method (Matsuda et al., 2013). Commercially available emotion cards mostly use Ekman's (1999) six major emotion classifications as a foundation for initial classification, with each classification then providing different emotion vocabulary according to positive/negative emotions (pleasure dimension) or intensities (arousal dimension).

Table 2
Compilation of Literature on Emotional Dimensional Perception

Literature Content	Data Source
The PAD model divides emotions into three dimensions: (1) P (Pleasure): referring to Pleasure and Displeasure, distinguishing whether the emotional state is positive or negative. (2) A (Arousal): referring to Arousal and Non-arousal, a combination of emotional sensitivity and physical vitality. (3) D (Dominance): referring to Dominance and Submissiveness, representing the degree to which emotions are controlled.	Mehrabian (1996), Tarasenko (2010)
Thayer (1989) proposed the Valence-Arousal emotion plane (V-A emotion plane) model. The horizontal axis is Valence, indicating the pleasure level of emotions, with positive and negative feelings at opposite ends. The vertical axis is Arousal, indicating the fluctuation level of emotions. Higher values indicate greater emotional fluctuation after receiving stimulation (active), and lower values indicate calmness (passive).	Thayer (1989)
Circumplex model of affect: Divides emotions into two dimensions: valence and arousal. Valence refers to the feeling of the subject after receiving stimulation; arousal refers to the degree of emotional activation after the subject receives stimulation.	Russell (1980)

Source: Compiled by this research (2024)

Card Effectiveness

In psychology, the use of card images for psychological projection has been documented for decades (Cohen et al., 2015). However, there is limited quantitative research on using cards in counseling work. When cards serve as counseling tools, objective statistical data should prove their applicability (Cohen et al., 2015).

Based on years of experience using cards in counseling work and relevant literature (Chung, 2013; Liang, 2013; Yang, 2011), Liang and Hsu (2016) summarized that the effects of using cards in counseling mainly include these three points: (1) Cards can reduce clients' resistance to counseling and helping build relationships with clients. (2) The patterns or text on cards may represent a part of the client's subconscious, helping clients recognize their emotional distress. (3) The process of clients describing personal feelings, thoughts, experiences, and stories through cards can achieve self-healing effects.

Cards have visual elements, immediacy, and accessibility, so clients don't view them as threatening (Cohen et al., 2015). Cohen et al. (2015) explored how therapeutic association cards affect emotional states. The study used a set of 88 therapeutic association cards as research samples and employed the SAM self-assessment system (The Self-Assessment Manikin) to investigate whether card patterns might induce different emotional states in clients. Research results showed that cards significantly influence subjects' emotional states. This study reflects that card patterns affect clients' emotions. If the visual design of the card doesn't meet expected goals and expectations, it might affect counseling effectiveness.

Based on function and usage, emotion cards can be divided into “clarification-type” and “projection type” (Huang et al., 2016; Kuo & Shen, 2014). Clarification-type cards primarily

present text. Through the text on cards, clients can examine and judge the degree of match between the card text and their own state (Kuo & Shen, 2014). Pai's (2014) research mentioned that over 85% of junior high school counselors use “clarification-type” cards in individual interviews. Most emotion cards are clarification-type cards which have corresponding emotion images and text presented on the cards for each emotion.

Emotions, Expressions, and Colors

Non-verbal expressions of emotions include facial expressions, tone, body posture, and movements, with facial expressions being the most frequently discussed element of emotions (Calder et al., 2003; Lang et al., 2005). This may explain why emotion cards often use facial expression images as content. Beyond the common six basic expressions (happy, surprised, sad, angry, fearful, disgusted), people can combine these expressions to create compound expressions such as surprised-happy or sad-angry. Research has shown that human faces can make at least 21 different facial expressions (Du et al., 2014).

Shimokawa et al. (2001) defined emotion recognition as “the ability to identify others' emotions from their facial expressions or situations.” Machajdik and Hanbury (2010) classified emotions using images based on psychological and artistic theories. Their classification reference elements included: color, texture, composition and content. The images were sourced from the IAPS system (International Affective Pictures System) (Bradley & Lang, 2017); they adjusted image colors and applied different textures to images. Results showed their method improved emotion image classification, making image classification closer to the general public's perception of emotions from images. This paper showed that: (1) Image design affects user perception of images; (2) cards, when appropriately designed, can better match the general public's cognition.

Color is also an important factor affecting emotions. Ou et al.’s (2004) research explored whether color and color appearance (saturation, brightness, etc.), emotions (e.g., happy, joyful), and color attributes (cool-warm, light-heavy) had the closest relationship with color. Research results showed that emotions had the closest relationship with color. Gao and Xin's (2006) research discussed the influence of hue, chroma, and brightness on human emotions. The results of the experiment found that hue influences human definitions of emotions, meaning humans, upon seeing certain colors, might associate certain emotions with them. Phongsuphap and Kamolrat (2015) proposed a method to determine emotions of images, using 20 colors representing emotions as a basis for judgment. Research showed that emotional colors is effective in the judgement of images.

Japanese scholars Oyama et al. (1963) conducted color and emotion experiments with Japanese and American students, and their results showed that people generally tend to positively (toward good) of yellow, green, and blue colors more frequently; whereas colors closer to purple and red areas were negatively evaluated (toward bad) more frequently; black and gray were considered “bad” emotions; white was evaluated as a “good” emotion. Additionally, research indicated red is often associated with negative things (Kuhbandner & Pekrun, 2013; Schietecat et al., 2018), particularly with anger, danger, and failure-related emotion words (Fetterman et al., 2012; Pravossoudovitch et al., 2014). The above research showed how people have certain impressions about emotions associated with a particular color.

Research Method

Emotion Card Criteria Data Established in 2022

This research is based on emotion card criteria established in 2022 as the foundation for card design and content validation. Here, we first provide previous research data, including the "essential emotion vocabulary" list (Table 3), emotion color design reference color swatches (example in Table 4), and emotion facial expression design image element references (example in Table 5). In 2022 research, it was consolidated that emotions can be divided into positive and negative emotions. Positive emotion cards include three categories with 22 terms; negative emotion cards include seven categories with 40 terms.

Table 3

"Essential Emotion Vocabulary" List

Type	Group	Vocabulary
Positive Emotions (N = 22)	Comfort	Relaxed, Comfort, Moved, Calm, Reassured, Blessed
	Happiness	Anticipation, Satisfied, Joyful, Cheerful, Happiness, Grateful, Excited, Like
	Other	Trust, Confident, Hopeful, Shy, Envious, Proud, Stimulated, Love
Negative Emotions (N = 40)	Shame	Embarrassed, Humiliated, Guilty, Remorseful
	Surprise	Surprise, Shocked
	Sadness	Disappointed, Discouraged, Exhausted, Sad, Hurt, Wronged, Lonely, Solitary, Sadness, Suffering
	Disgust	Helpless, Bored, Contemptuous, Unlucky, Hateful, Disgusted, Disgust
	Fear	Uneasy, Doubtful, Tense, Worried, Anxious, Fear, Terrified
	Anger	Troubled, Irritated, Frustrated, Jealous, Anger, Furious
	Other	Self-deprecating, Empty, Confused, Ambivalent

The 2022 research compiled emotion color reference swatch examples through questionnaire surveys as shown in Table 4. The left side of Table 4, "Emotion Color Impression Questionnaire," shows color swatches selected by respondents from 153 swatches as best expressing that emotion. The number below the swatch is the vote count from 62 respondents. The right side of Table 4, "Emotion Color Compatibility Questionnaire," invited respondents to evaluate the compatibility between paper color swatches (from 11 commercial emotion cards) and emotion terms. The number below the swatch is the score (rating scale 1–7).

Table 4

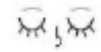
Example of Emotion Color Reference Swatches

Group	Vocabulary	Emotion Color Impression Questionnaire	Emotion Color Compatibility Questionnaire
Comfort	Relaxed	8 8 8 6 5 4 4 4 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3	5.58 5.34 5.05 5.02
	Comfort	8 7 6 6 6 6 5 5 5 4 4 4 3 3 3 3 3	5.76 5.58 5.55 5.06
	Calm	12 12 10 6 5 5 4 4 4 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3	5.82 5.27 5.06
Anger	Troubled	5 4 4 4 4 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3	5.40 5.28 5.27 5.03
	Jealous	10 7 6 6 6 6 5 4 4 4 3 3 3 3 3 3 3	5.58 5.24
	Anger	27 20 15 8 5 5 4 3	5.89 5.37 5.03

Based on the "Essential Emotion Vocabulary" (Table 3), respondents were asked to select corresponding facial expression elements based on their impressions of each emotion term. The research team first analyzed facial expression images from 11 commercial card decks to create a "Facial Expression Element List" (including head angle, face, eyebrows, eyes, mouth, auxiliary patterns, etc.), with different element images of each part being numbered. Visual elements with percentages reaching 5% (items selected by 3 or more out of 55 respondents) were used as reference items for emotion facial expression design. Due to the extensive data, only one example is listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Emotion Facial Expression Design Image Element Reference Example: Calm

Vocabulary	Elements	Items	Research Data Results		
Calm	Head Angle	Image			
		N	36	6	6
	Hair	Image		Didn't find a suitable element	
		N	9	4	
	Eyebrows	Image			
		N	24	22	5
	Eyes	Image			
		N	23	14	14
	Mouth	Image			
		N	23	22	4
	Face	Image		No need any element	
		N	24	19	6
	Auxiliary Patterns	Image	No need any element		
		N	33	6	5

Emotion Card Visual Design Content Validation

This research found users to conduct "card visual design criteria content validation" where emotion card visual design criteria and card design were modified based on feedback from the interview. The procedures are described below: (1) The emotion card design criteria was planned based on the 2022 "Emotion Card Visual Design Criteria," (2) card design, (3) interview question design, (4) inviting two users for pre-testing, (5) formal interviews (Distributing informed consent forms, providing paper interview outlines, questionnaires, cards, and recording the interview process), and (6) conducting data analysis and content analysis.

Card Design

Word-image cards are the most commonly used type of cards in the market (Chen, 2017), examples of such are emotion cards that place text and images on the same card face;

alternatively, OH cards where text and images are on different cards. Word-image cards help clients become aware of and clarify personal feelings, and also allow clients to freely interpret the meaning of the cards. This research aims to understand whether using the visual design guidelines established in the 2022 research to design emotion cards can produce clarification-type emotion cards that are appropriate for users. Therefore, emotional vocabulary, colors, and facial expression images are combined to design two common styles sold in the market.

Color-Focused. (word-image cards) (Figure 1 left) Based on established emotional vocabulary and reference colors in the design guidelines (Table 4), each card face presents gradient colors as the visual focus representing the connotation of its emotional vocabulary. According to the design guidelines, the top three colors from "User Impression" (left side of Table 4) and "Colors Used in Commercial Cards" (right side of Table 4) (six colors in total) are selected as the foundation. Three colors are selected based on the principle of color harmony for linear gradient matching purposes. The card faces do not have lines, patterns, figurative patterns, or facial expression images, hence making the gradient color combinations of the 62 cards as non-repetitive.

Facial Expression-Focused. (word-image cards) (Figure 1 right) In addition to color elements, facial expression images are added to the cards. Each card face has both colors and facial expression images (mainly head), and the text size consistent with the previous card style. The colors on the cards are presented in blocks. According to the design guidelines, the top three colors from "User Impression" (left side of Table 4) and "Colors Used in Commercial Cards" (left side of Table 4) (six colors in total) are selected as the foundation. Three colors are selected based on the principle of color harmony and applied to the cards. The facial expression images take reference from the design guidelines (Table 5), selecting the top three visual features for each part to form reasonable facial expression images.

Figure 1

Examples of Two Emotion Card Styles in This Study



Note. Left: color-focused; right: facial expression-focused

Interview Question Design

The research interview aims to validate the content of the "Emotional Card Visual Design Guidelines" and the design of two card styles, then proceeding with the sequential content validation for the Emotional Color and Facial Expression Design, and try to find possible improvement solutions. The audio of the entire interview will be recorded with the interview desk as the main picture. The interview is expected to take approximately 1.5 hours to complete. The following explains the validation procedures and methods according to the evaluation objectives. The interview procedure in this study is as follows:

Step 1 Provide cards, ask interviewees to casually observe and browse through them.
Step 2 Score each card using a Likert seven-point scale as the standard grading scale.
Step 3 The researcher selects cards with scores of 4 (inclusive) or below.
Step 4 Interviewees use markers on the selected cards to indicate where they disagree with the scores, while verbally explaining their reasons for disagreeing.
Step 5 Ask interviewees to try to describe possible improvement solutions from them.

Research Participants

This study plans to invite at least 90 users to validate each card style. Students (half male, half female) and full-time workers (half male, half female) between the ages of 20 to 45 are invited. The interview venue is fixed in the researcher's office at the school the researcher is employed at. Interviews are conducted in a one-on-one format.

Analysis Method

Conduct statistical analysis (one-sample T-test) on the questionnaires completed by users. Cards not agreed upon by more than half (over 50%) of the interviewees (scores below 4) are listed as first priority for improvement. All results are listed according to statistical results, and cards not agreed upon by more than 20% of interviewees (scores below 4) are also emotional cards that need design adjustments in this study. Content analysis procedures are conducted based on the verbal responses of interviewees, which serve as references for card design improvement.

Results and Discussion

Results

The interview results for the two card samples are as follows: 91 interviewees for color cards and 92 interviewees for facial expression image cards; the age range of interviewees for both card styles is between 20–45 years old. The information of interviewees for each card style is summarized (Table 6).

Table 6
Summary of Basic Information of Interviewees for Two Card Styles

Item / Sample		Gender		Status			Without Art Background	Never Used Emotion Cards Before
		Male	Female	Student	Full-time	Other		
Color	N	42	49	38	44	9	73	74
	%	46.2	53.8	41.8	48.4	9.8	80.2	81.3
Facial Expression	N	43	49	31	51	10	75	74
	%	46.3	53.7	33.7	55.4	10.9	81.5	80.4

This study first conducted one-sample T-tests on each card of the two samples, and 6 was set as the test value to identify cards significantly higher than 6 points. Results showed that among the 124 cards in the two styles, 9 cards received high agreement from interviewees ($p < .05$), with 1 color card and 8 facial expression image cards. The summary of test results is organized in Table 7.

Table 7
Summary of Questionnaire Survey Results for Two Card Samples

Analysis Item / Card Grouping and Vocabulary		Cards with Mean Scores Significantly Higher than 6 ($p < .05$)		Cards with Mean Scores Significantly Lower than 5 ($p < .05$)	
		Color	Facial Expression Image	Color	Facial Expression Image
Comfort	Relaxed	6.26			
Happiness	Satisfied		6.23		
	Happiness		6.18		
	Grateful			4.54	
	Excited		6.33		
Other Positive	Envious			4.70	
	Love		6.21		
Shame	Humiliated				4.33
Disgust	Disgusted		6.30		
Anger	Irritated		6.24		
	Jealous				4.27
	Anger		6.30		
	Furious		6.48		

In addition, one-sample T-tests were conducted on each card of the two samples, setting 5 as the test value to identify cards significantly lower than 5 points. Results showed that among the 124 cards in the two styles, only 4 cards received lower agreement from interviewees ($p < .05$), including 2 color cards (Grateful and Envious) and 2 facial expression image cards (Humiliated and Jealous); indicating that most interviewees agreed with the card design in this study, and these data results will serve as references for "design adjustments needed" cards in the future.

In addition to selecting cards with higher and lower agreement through statistical analysis, this study also identified cards with scores below 4 (not inclusive) by more than 20% of interviewees, meaning that more than 20% of interviewees strongly disagreed with that design. The compiled results are shown in Table 8. There are 4 color cards and 6 facial expression image cards. From Table 8, it can be seen that cards with lower agreement do not have repeated vocabulary in the two card styles, showing that the low design agreement is not influenced by the connotation of that emotional vocabulary (e.g., the emotion is more abstract, making it difficult to present through colors and images).

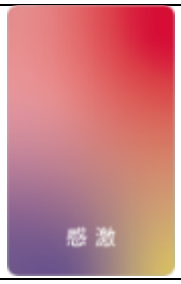
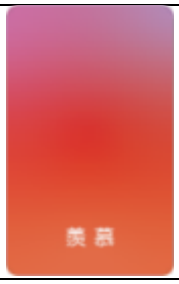
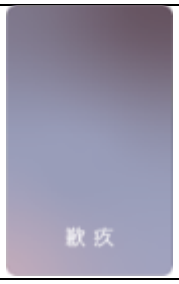
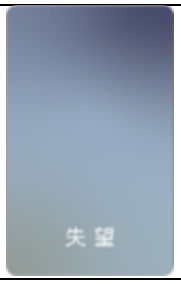
Regarding the independent sample T test results of the two card styles, statistical analysis results have shown that among the two card styles, the "facial expression image" cards have significantly higher agreement than the "color" cards ($F = 0.374$; $p = .001 < .05$). This result indicates that "facial expression image" cards ($M = 5.71$, $Sd = 0.68$) seem to receive more understanding and agreement than "color" cards ($M = 5.40$, $Sd = 0.61$) from interviewees, as vocabulary combined with images and colors can help users grasp the meaning of that emotion more quickly.

Table 8
Summary Table of Cards With Scores Below 4 (Not Inclusive) by More Than 25% of Interviewees

Group	Vocabulary	Cards with Scores Below 4 (Not Inclusive) by More Than 20% of Interviewees	
		Color (N = 91)	Facial Expression Image (N = 92)
Comfort	Relaxed		
Happiness	Grateful	25	
Shame	Humiliated		29
	Guilty	21	
Sadness	Disappointed	21	
	Lonely		18
	Suffering		22
Disgust	Bored	21	
Fear	Anxious		
Anger	Jealous		33
Other Negative	Empty		19
	Ambivalent		23

Summarizing the above research results, there are 5 color cards that need adjustment (grateful, envious, remorseful, disappointed, bored) and 6 facial expression image cards that need adjustment (embarrassed, lonely, painful, jealous, empty, conflicted). This study compiled interviewees' design ideas and suggestions for the above cards, and complete design suggestions compiled in Table 9. These are mainly selected from feedback from interviewees with scores of 4 or below.

Table 9
Design Suggestion Table for Cards Needing Modification

Vocabulary / Card Style	Grateful	Envious	Guilty	Disappointed	Bored
Color					
	Remove purple, add more yellow or yellow-orange.	Add more purple, make the overall colors brighter.	Referring to the color adjustment of “regret”, the pink tone in the lower left corner needs further adjustment.	Increase the area at the top, create a feeling of pressing down, make the color at the top heavier and darker	Can be adjusted to a single color to convey a sense of boredom, could refer to the color adjustment of “emptiness”.

Vocabulary / Card Style	Humiliated	Lonely	Suffering
Facial Expression Image			
	The green part needs adjustment. The sweater material is too eye-catching, will suggest changing the gesture to covering the face.	Can refer to the image of "lonely", reduce the feeling of messiness.	Need to change the action, including not a head-holding posture, maybe change to arms folded across chest, eyes don't necessarily need bloodshot appearance. For the color part, perhaps deepen the colors, add more gray-black.
	Jealous	Empty	Ambivalent
			
	Change the eyes to looking sideways, cross the arms, don't add red to the nose tip. Besides purple, can add more red.	Too similar to "bored", too much gray is instead misleading. Should reduce unnecessary symbols, the eyes should be emptier.	Looks too much like thinking which suggests confusion, doesn't have a feeling of conflict. Colors should have more contrast to create a sense of opposition, can add examples of conflicting images, or directly present opposing objects.

From the interview results, it can be found that interviewees' perceptions of emotional colors and facial expression images mostly come from personal life experiences and impressions. This is especially so for colors as some interviewees mentioned that their personal likes and dislikes for certain colors would affect their perception of emotional colors. Furthermore, interviewees also responded that the two card styles each have advantages and disadvantages, and are thus possibly suitable for different groups and different emotional issues, which also echoes why text cards, color cards, and image cards coexist in the market. Additionally, most interviewees believe that if the function of cards is to become aware of emotions, recognize emotions, or express emotions, the 62 cards should have different visual designs as much as possible, helping users distinguish between emotions and make comparisons.

Discussions

Card Design

Some interviewees suggested that the gradient form of color cards (linear direction from top right to bottom left) doesn't have to be limited to just one type and can have more variations to match the connotation of emotional vocabulary, such as concentric circle gradients, radial gradients, or even vertical gradients or parallel gradients can be tried. Moreover, some emotions can use a single color, two or more gradient colors to express based on emotional vocabulary.

Facial expression image cards focus on the combination of elements such as expressions, actions, and backgrounds in 62 cards, which need to be different from each other. However, when facial expression image cards were initially designed, because of adhering to the design guidelines' results (only focusing on changes in facial expressions), it led to insufficient variation in the expressions and actions of the figures, causing some cards to not gain agreement from interviewees. This result showed that when establishing design guidelines in the 2022 research, the facial expression image elements provided to subjects were not sufficiently comprehensive and diverse (especially lacking discussion of hand gestures, which can effectively help express emotions), resulting in slightly insufficient image variation when entering the formal card design phase, hence it was only able to get possible feedback for improvement through interviewee feedback.

Recruitment and Collection of Interviewees

This study originally planned for a 1:1 male to female ratio of interviewees. However, during the recruitment process, male interviewees were difficult to recruit, so in line with market conditions, female participation was increased and male participation was reduced, resulting in a final gender ratio which deviated from the original plan. In addition, the proportions of interviewees for the two card styles were almost close in terms of “whether they have an art design background” and “whether they have used emotion cards before,” thus effectively controlling the differences between interviewees for the two card styles.

Content Validation of Emotional Color and Facial Expression Design

After content validation and interviews for each card style, the research results found that interviewees agreed more with the design of “facial expression image” cards. Researchers infer that this order precisely highlights the degree of abstraction of the two card styles, with facial expression visual design being more figurative and color being more abstract, which may be the reason for the significance in statistical analysis results.

Overall, the designs of both card styles received affirmation from most interviewees. Based on statistical analysis data, a total of 11 card designs need adjustment (5 color cards and 6 facial expression image cards), which is only about 8.9% of the total 124 cards. It is worth noting that the vocabulary of these 11 cards are all different, indicating that inappropriately designed cards are not influenced by the difficulty of emotional vocabulary content, but mainly by whether the designer can effectively transform design guidelines into visual designs that align with user cognition.

Conclusion and Suggestions

After content validation by interviewees, the designs of most cards in the two styles designed by this study (color, facial expression image) received agreement from interviewees. Only 11 cards clearly needed design adjustments, with color cards accounting for 5 (grateful, envious, remorseful, disappointed, bored) and facial expression image cards accounting for 6 (embarrassed, lonely, painful, jealous, empty, conflicted). After suggestions and feedback from interviewees, most of the possible modification directions (including adjustments to colors and facial expression images) have clear modification solutions.

The facial expression images ultimately received higher overall agreement, which was presumably related to the degree of concreteness of the cards. The concreteness of cards can to some extent help users recognize and understand the connotations, arousal levels, and pleasure levels of different emotional vocabulary. In comparison, color cards are indeed more abstract and less concrete in guiding the connotations, arousal levels, and pleasure levels of emotional vocabulary, instead relying on users' personal experiences and imagination. For individuals who do not understand their own emotional states, they might not be able to effectively answer personal emotional distress problems. But from another perspective, color cards, precisely because of their abstraction, possess broader projection and expression capabilities.

This study mainly focuses on content validation and usability evaluation of the visual design of emotion cards. Future in-depth research and exploration can be conducted on the following issues:

1. Re-validation of the content of modified card designs in this study to confirm the possibility of future printing and publication.
2. Research related to the application of visual design guidelines for emotion cards or practical application of cards, such as feasibility studies on applying the design guidelines of this study to different age groups, different card designs (such as separating words and images), and validation of usage methods.
3. Research on the actual application of this study's emotion cards in counseling and guidance cases or emotional education.

Acknowledgements

This study was partially supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan, MOST 111-2410-H-845 -030 -MY2. The authors are grateful for this support.

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No Reason to Stay in the Real World Any Longer Anime Series and Spirituality in Post-Aum Japan

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In 1995, the sarin gas attack by Aum Shinrikyō provoked a short circuit in Japanese society. New New Religions (*shin shinshūkyō*) became associated with sectarian violence disappearing from the public discourse, while trust in media and government plummeted. Against this background, I argue that animated series *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998, Triangle Staff), *Boogiepop Phantom* (2000, Madhouse), and *Paranoia Agent* (2004, Madhouse) helped young adults of the Lost Decade (*ushinawareta jūnen*) fulfill their longing for transcendence outside discredited religious frameworks. These series did so by means of narratives where hypertechnology (*Lain*), contact with superhuman beings (*Boogiepop Phantom*) or paranormal entities (*Paranoia Agent*) invite an existentialist redefinition of the "self" and its relationship with society. They also share a quasi-stand-alone structure, where each episode is conceived as a self-sufficient "experience" (*taiken*) addressing a different human type, thus replicating the intimacy of spiritual experiences. Finally, they all foresee some sort of apocalypse (i.e., the Wire reset in *Lain*, the pillar of light in *Boogiepop Phantom*, the black ooze in *Paranoia Agent*) whose costs outweigh the benefits. By engaging in a formal and linguistic analysis of each episode of each series, I have summarized the preliminary findings regarding how these anime are telling of the trying times they were produced in, and how they reopened the discourse on spirituality in the post-Aum scenario.

Keywords: anime, Aum Shinrikyō, Madhouse, new religions, science fiction

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Introduction

Defining "New New Religions"

Since the late 1980s, worsening political and environmental conditions in Japan had been attracting more and more people to new religious movements, especially among the working-age population (Shimazono, 1995). Often referred to as "New New Religions" (*shin shinshūkyō*) in the scholarly discourse, in order to distinguish them from comparable movements in the late Meiji, Taishō, and pre-war Shōwa periods (Anderson, 1995), they share some features that call for a separate classification.

New New Religions seek to provide their followers with spiritual reassurance where materialism and science have failed to do so, yet maintain that technological developments are necessary for the salvation of humanity. They also encourage a world-renouncing attitude in order to be fully prepared for said collective salvation, to be witnessed in the form of an Armageddon. However, as only those equipped with true faith would survive, their salvific message is found in contradiction with their apocalyptic outlook. As per how adepts can prepare themselves for this scenario, they place renewed emphasis on self-improvement through individual experiences (*taiken*), meditation, and imitation of the spiritual leader (Shimazono, 1995).

The Post-Aum Scenario

In the beginning, the attitude of national media towards these groups was not necessarily critical. If anything, because the founders of the above-mentioned groups did not present themselves as cult leaders, but as intellectuals criticizing capitalist society. Treated mainly as a talk show sensation that could easily spark criticism or praise based on how they positioned themselves, New New Religions flooded the public discourse, catering to the curiosity of young adults genuinely interested in spirituality and alternative life paths (Metraux, 1995).

However, this was no longer the case after the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway on March 20, 1995, perpetrated by Aum Shinrikyō adepts.

From that point on, the mediatic narrative unified: broadcasting channels aired edited cuts of the promotional videos created by Aum, emphasizing its fanatic aspects; newspapers, in the attempt to differentiate from competitors, often took any leak at face value without verifying nor attributing information, and started turning rumors into factualized accounts (Hardacre, 2007/2008).

Once the story died out, any debate on or coverage of New New Religions as a social phenomenon rather than as a threat to national security—as had been the case before the attack on the Tokyo subway—became impossible. They eventually disappeared from the public discourse, together with the vocabulary and the new perspectives they had contributed to disclose.

It is precisely against this background that I argue that the anime *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998, Triangle Staff), *Boogiepop Phantom* (2000, Madhouse), and *Paranoia Agent* 2004, Madhouse) bear the sign of those trying times, and that helped reintroduce the vocabulary employed by New New Religions that appealed to the young adults of the Lost Decade (*ushinawareta jūnen*).

Research Sample

Serial Experiments Lain (id.)

Production: Triangle Staff, 1998, 13 episodes.

Staff: Nakamura Ryūtarō (director), Ueda Yasuyuki (producer), Konaka Chiaki (writer), Abe Yoshitoshi (character design), Tsuruoka Yōta (sound design).

Synopsis: Iwakura Lain is a quiet middle school student living in the suburbs of Tokyo. After the suicide of her classmate Chisa, whose consciousness is apparently preserved in the Wired (i.e., the Internet), Lain develops an interest in Navi systems (i.e., personal computers). There, Lain will find God, or at least something quite close to it.

Boogiepop Phantom (*Bugīpoppu wa warawanai*)

Production: Madhouse, 2000, 12 episodes.

Staff: Watanabe Takashi (director), Maruyama Masao (producer), Murai Sadayuki (writer), Suga Shigayuki (character design), Tsuruoka Yōta (sound design).

Synopsis: A prequel to the eponymous light novel by Kadono Kōhei published in 1998, it is set in a provincial city in Japan where a mysterious pillar of light appears. As a result, some people acquire supernatural powers, while others disappear. Investigating the facts that occurred five years earlier, Boogiepop, an emissary of death, will try to restore order.

Paranoia Agent (*Mōsō dairinin*)

Production: Madhouse, 2004, 13 episodes.

Staff: Kon Satoshi (director), Tsuruzaki Rika (producer), Minakami Seishi (writer), Andō Masashi (character design), Mima Masafumi (sound design).

Synopsis: Sagi Tsukiko, creator of the hit character Maromi, is attacked by a boy on rollerblades with a baseball bat. Shortly after, more innocent citizens are assaulted by the same boy, whom the media tentatively name "*shōnen batto"* ("Lil" Slugger' in the English version). Tokyo police investigate, trying to find a connection between the cases.

Literature Review

Anime and the Post-Aum Scenario

Only limited academic literature by Western scholars has devoted attention to the three animated series that make up the research sample. In addition, a link between these series and the new mass religious movements in Japan in the chosen timeframe has never been established.

Scholarship on *Serial Experiments Lain*

Addressing the problem of existence in contemporary Japanese animation, Napier (2005) devotes some remarks to how *Serial Experiments Lain* makes viewers question whether the

erasure from the material world undergone by the protagonist can be read as downgrading, inasmuch as the cyberspace seems to be a much more rewarding alternative to physical reality.

Interestingly, in her concluding thoughts, Napier interprets *Serial Experiments Lain*'s cyberpunk allure, embodied by the cyberspace, as one of those "other worlds" (p. 78) that, encompassing the spiritual and the supernatural, invite a redefinition of what reality and individuality stand for.

Along this line of reasoning, the study by Jackson (2012) further develops the concept by employing the theoretical tools of Cartesian geometry, reading Lain's ambiguous *locus* of identity as a spatial corollary to the equally Cartesian maxim "*cogito ergo sum*." According to this analysis, *Serial Experiments Lain*'s worldbuilding—conjoining the "real" and the "virtual" space—rests on an objection to the traditional Cartesian model, in that it assumes a universe not coverable by a single, unambiguous Cartesian system.

Counterintuitively, while the univocity of the "self" has long been believed to represent a fixed point within the increasingly fragmented, multinodal space we inhabit today—eerily similar to the one Lain inhabits—it appears that *Serial Experiments Lain* confutes such univocity.

As the "self" does not substantiate the world around us, but is rather shaped by it in its unfolding, it can be concluded that inhabiting a world with blurred and shifting boundaries equals to an uncertain, ever-redefining self-identity. The founding principle of reality thus must lie somewhere else, and spirituality becomes a viable epistemological alternative.

Scholarship on *Boogiepop Phantom*

Surprisingly little has been written about *Boogiepop Phantom*. Publications tracking the developments of anime subculture at large briefly mention it for the sake of completeness (Daza-Orozco et al., 2018).

In fact, the essay by Grela (2011) is perhaps the only publication devoting enough space to discuss it in depth. Defined as a "progressive anime" (p. 126) with authorial ambitions, *Boogiepop Phantom* is first analyzed as a part of the wider multimedia franchise initiated by the eponymous light novel by Kadono Kōhei, whose context allows one to fully enjoy the series. As a stand-alone product, its narrative device, continuously switching between the present, the recent past (i.e., a few months earlier) and the remote past (i.e., five years earlier), is observed to function as a stream of consciousness. Finally, again as a stand-alone product, its representation of the female body is said to stand in contrast with industry standards of the time, as it does not comply with the logic of fanservice.

However insightful, Grela's analysis does not frame *Boogiepop Phantom* within the social and historical context of Japan at the time when the anime was produced, thus overlooking any possible link with spirituality and religious mass movements.

Scholarship on *Paranoia Agent*

Given Kon Satoshi's popularity as one of the directors that most contributed to changing Western audiences' perception of anime as an artistic medium, *Paranoia Agent* is featured in monographic studies covering Kon's body of work.

Yet, perhaps precisely because of Kon's reputation, the series has often been overlooked compared to his full-length animated features.

Among the publications that dedicate particular attention to *Paranoia Agent*, the study by Figal (2010) approaches it as a metaphor of the relationship between mass media and viewers-as-consumers, by which everybody is turned into an "*otaku manqué*—obsessive 'fans' of media products without the attendant specialized knowledge of them or active engagement in them" (p. 140). Not without a certain self-irony, the series points out how anime themselves—*Paranoia Agent* included—have proven complicit in dulling the senses of the masses. Therefore, if one were to find an answer to the question "Who is the monster?", which detectives Ikari Keiichi and Maniwa Mitsuhiro also grapple with in the 13 episodes of the series, there would be no need to search that far.

While not disregarding the soundness of this first level of reading, detecting Kon's criticism of late capitalism, it should be pointed out how such a relationship between media and audience is based on what Japanese citizens experienced first-hand in the immediate aftermath of the Aum terrorist attacks.

At that point in time, the ready-made consumer good that mainstream media were feeding to the masses—in the same fashion as the terrifying Lil' Slugger portrayed by the news in *Paranoia Agent*—was the horrific, heavily manipulated updates on Asahara's sect, and on any other sect that was believed to harbor comparable ambitions. Figal also does not fail to notice how the black ooze engulfing the citizens of Tokyo in the final episode equals an apocalypse, brought about by the triumph of consumer culture, and whose possibility for palingenesis is denied in the closing sequences. After a two-year reconstruction plan, reminiscent of Japan's postwar rebuild, the citizens of Tokyo are back to their routine, squished in commuter trains, and surrounded by products they do not really want.

Methodology

By means of a formal analysis, according to the methodology established in film studies by Thompson (1988), combined with a linguistic analysis, according to the methodology established in content analysis by Krippendorff (2018), I have addressed the following research questions:

- How are the anime series *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998), *Boogiepop Phantom* (2000) and *Paranoia Agent* (2004) telling of the trying times they were produced in?
- How did the above-mentioned anime series help reopen the discourse on spirituality in the post-Aum scenario?

By systematically rewatching all the episodes of each series, I noted down and categorized any instance that, on a technical, narrative, or lexical level, could be telling of the specific period in which these anime were produced, and/or pertaining to the religious discourse before this was discontinued by mainstream media due to the Aum shock.

Due to length and formatting reasons, the original tables (one per each series) have not been recreated below. In the Results and Discussion section, I will elaborate directly on the significance of the recurring patterns observed on a technical, narrative, or lexical level. However, in order to provide an indication of how I have systematized the observed instances, the original template has been recreated below.

Table 1
Template: Dimensions for Formal and Linguistic Analysis

Series Title JP/EN (Studio, Year)			**Existential Redefinition of the "Self"**	**Human Type Represented**	**Social Issue Addressed**	**Apocalypse Represented? (Y/N)**
Ep. No.	Ep. Title					
Ep. 00	Title JP/EN		Quote with timestamp JP/EN	Age group, occupation, etc.	Bullying/Self-segregation, etc.	Y/N

Results and Discussion

Recurring Patterns: Technical Level

All three series present urban settings, whose infrastructures (e.g., train tracks, factories) and machines (e.g., utility poles, security cameras) appear far more detailed than their landmarks and inhabitants.

They also rely on a complementary color palette, where the vivid colors of neon lights and street illumination—usually associated with the representational tropes of Tokyo in mainstream animation—are absent. The color gamut is that of healthcare facilities (i.e., light blue, grey), but when illusion takes over reality—provided that the boundary between the two can be ascertained—it shifts to the other end of the spectrum (i.e., bright yellow, orange).

Sound design is invariably invasive, creating a sense of disorientation as city sounds (e.g., station jingles, electrical hums, ringtones, traffic) can be heard even when their source is not supposed to be there, or when it is impossible to determine the location of the source as the latter is supposedly off-screen.

Consistently with sound design, editing purposely defies continuity: an eyeline match is often not followed by the object being looked at by the subject framed by the camera. Match-on-action continuity is also missing, as an axial cut may follow.

Recurring Patterns: Narrative Level

Even though the synopses provided do not allow us to appreciate the overlaps between the plots, it suffices to say that all three series open with a teenager or young adult having to deal with a violent crime, and conclude with some sort of apocalypse.

While maintaining a substantially stand-alone structure, episodes' primary focus is often teenagers or young adults who struggle to "fit in." This applies especially to the countless secondary characters, among which recurring archetypes can be observed (i.e., each series has a dedicated episode for the *otaku*, the failing student, the unpopular high school girl, etc.).

The social issues portrayed (i.e., suicidal tendencies, drug abuse, desensitization to violence, lack of interpersonal relations) are those associated by mainstream media with the demographics of students and working adults, which also represent the age groups that underwent mediatic bashing for their supposedly "unhealthy" interest in religion in the

immediate aftermath of the Aum attacks. This also explains why all three series align in providing a negative portrayal of journalists and law enforcement.

As a result, inasmuch as each episode is dedicated to a specific human type, characters—whether main or minor—are not directly tied to each other despite playing a role in the same horizontal plotline. They might pass by each other without knowing that they have a part in the same scheme, thus reinforcing the self-contained dimension of each episode (i.e., vertical plot-oriented storytelling).

Recurring Patterns: Lexical Level

Throughout all three series, special emphasis is placed on the contrast between "people" (*ningen*, which is biologically marked compared to the more common *hito*) and "society" (*shakai*), "reality" (*genjitsu*; *riaru*) and "illusion" (*mōsō*; *bācharu*), "memories" (*kioku*; *ishiki*, in the sense of "memory" as the act of "becoming aware") and "lies" (*uso*; *nisemono*).

Specialized lexicon pertaining to the narrative of humanity's quasi-extinction and the cultivation of individual abilities, encompassing vocabulary such as "prophecy" (*yogen*; *otsuge*), "salvation" (*sukui*; *kyūsai*), "evolution" (*shinka*; *saishū keitai*), "supernatural powers" (f*ushigina chikara*) and "superior knowledge" (*kōdona chisei*), used by New New Religions to support their proselytism activities in the observed time frame, is pervasive.

When "higher powers" are mentioned, they are explicitly labeled as "heretical groups" (*jakyō shūdan*) or "secret societies" (*himitsu kessha*): the same labels used by the Japanese media to describe religious mass movements in general after the Aum attack on Tokyo subway.

Finally, there is an overwhelming recurrence of internal state predicates: how characters feel is often the main subject of conversation (e.g., the passive use of the verb *oitsumeru*, "to corner," in *Paranoia Agent*). This points towards the soul-searching attitude purported by New New Religions, which used to encourage adepts to liberate themselves also at an emotional level.

Conclusions

As per the first research question, despite never mentioning any real event or organization, the sampled animated series describe a situation where Japanese society is shaken by violent events whose scale is unprecedented, and whose causes are unclear.

In this context, law enforcement appears unable to protect citizens, and the media prove unable to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon, eventually conveying polarizing news. Amidst collective unrest, Japanese society is portrayed as atomized: familial bonds and friendships seem to hold no value. In isolation, people rather form connections with complete strangers.

Overall, we can interpret the above as a historically accurate rendering of Japan in the aftermath of the Aum terrorist attacks, with particular reference to the younger generation, whose interest in spirituality had been stigmatized by the media.

As per the second research question, the sampled animated series resumed questioning the meaning of "self," "society," and "purpose," resorting to a vocabulary that had long disappeared from the public discourse. In doing so, however, they did not subscribe to any pre-

existing narrative: neither the messianic one of religious leaders, nor the derogatory one of mainstream media.

Plotwise, these series seem to suggest that events are governed by forces beyond the reach of the average person. However, they also share an outspoken statement urging the target audience to take accountability for their actions —or lack thereof—and accept reality: that is how any improvement process begins. On the contrary, escapism or blaming others will be of no avail.

On a darker note, they also appear to entertain the idea that societal collapse may not be inevitable, and that an Armageddon may eventually be upon us. Yet, that is not presented as something desirable, not even in a religious perspective.

Limitations and Future Research

The research herein presented is still at its embryonic stage. Reporting all the relevant instances detected and proceeding on an episode-by-episode basis, with the aid of the analysis of individual sequences, would have definitely contributed to reinforcing its claims. However, constraints of length have consistently limited this possibility.

As a further development, I intend to engage in thorough archival research in order to compare promotional material (e.g., print, video) developed by the New New Religions in the chosen timeframe before and after the heinous crimes of Aum, and to do the same with print and audiovisual material spread by mainstream media (e.g., major newspapers, TV broadcasters) on New New Religions before and after the same watershed event.

Finally, I intend to investigate how *Serial Experiments Lain*, *Boogiepop Phantom*, and *Paranoia Agent*, precisely because of their relegitimizing role towards spirituality and the other themes felt as most pressing by the Japanese youth, contributed to establishing a new standard for later science fiction anime series targeting the same demographics.

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Graphic Design in Architectural Education: A Pedagogical Model and SWOT Analysis

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Higher education in Architecture and Urbanism traditionally combines technical, creative, and cultural competencies, with design studios, drawing, and construction-focused project work as the dominant methods. The rapid development of digital technologies and visual tools, however, opens new opportunities for effective concept communication and project presentation. The course Presentation Techniques integrates graphic design into architectural education to develop students' digital and visual literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to translate complex information into visual forms. The theoretical framework is based on visual and critical thinking, which supports the interpretation and presentation of architectural ideas. Visual thinking enables students to understand spatial and material aspects, while critical thinking develops their ability to reflect on design choices and justify decisions in relation to aesthetic, cultural, and practical considerations. The methodology involved a SWOT analysis to evaluate the teaching model, combining modules on bitmap graphics, vector graphics, and multi-page document creation. The analysis assessed internal factors and external influences to inform recommendations for pedagogy. Results indicate that the model fosters visual literacy, creativity, student autonomy, and professional preparedness. Key challenges include the time-intensive nature of the course, varying digital skills among students, and high demands on educators. Recommendations include strengthening individual support, integrating reflection and critical evaluation, balancing digital and traditional methods, and extending the course to a full academic year. This approach demonstrates that combining graphic design with digital tools not only enhances technical competencies but also develops visual thinking, aesthetic sensibility, and the ability to communicate architectural concepts effectively.

Keywords: digital tools, visual thinking, graphic design, education

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Introduction

Higher education in the field of architecture and urbanism has traditionally operated at the intersection of technical, creative, and cultural competencies. Teaching methods have long been dominated by design studio work, technical drawing, and material or structural approaches to architectural design. However, the rapid evolution of digital technologies and visual tools has introduced new possibilities for the effective communication of concepts, project presentation formats, and the design process itself. The integration of graphic design into architectural education, specifically within the Presentation Techniques course, fosters not only students' digital literacy but also strengthens their visual literacy, critical thinking, and the creative capacity to transform diverse types of information into a clear, communicative form. Exercises in graphic design software provide a framework through which students learn to articulate their creative visions, both in a professional context and within the public sphere. To evaluate this teaching model, a SWOT analysis was employed to strategically consider the internal and external factors influencing its effectiveness. The SWOT approach is particularly valuable when formulating the strategic development of a course, reflecting on its didactic effectiveness, and defining opportunities for pedagogical innovation (Gurl, 2017).

Theoretical Overview: Visual and Critical Thinking in Graphic Design Education

Visual and critical thinking represent key competencies in architectural education, enabling students to comprehend, organize, and interpret complex information related to space, materials, users, and cultural contexts. Visual thinking is inherently linked to interpretation and representation. Visuality encompasses processes of visual perception (specifically the capacity to observe, retain, analyze, and learn through visual stimuli). Visualization, meanwhile, refers to the transformation of phenomena or processes into forms that allow for visual interpretation. Through this mechanism, abstract or latent properties of a given phenomenon become visible and comprehensible (Spousta, 2001).

For architecture students, developing visual thinking involves acquiring a visual language, mastering compositional principles, and learning to connect visual and textual layers into communicative formats. These skills are essential not only within creative processes but also when presenting future projects to professional audiences, clients, and interdisciplinary collaborators. Furthermore, visual thinking enhances aesthetic sensitivity, fostering the ability to conceptualize architectural ideas and translate them into a coherent visual form. In academic discourse, visual thinking is understood as the capacity to generate mental imagery and utilize it to solve complex or problematic situations. Closely related is visual literacy, which includes interpreting visual content, understanding its nuances, and using it as a primary means of communication. These theoretical approaches underscore the importance of visual imagination in both the learning process and the acquisition of new knowledge (Spousta, 2001).

Critical thinking complements this visual dimension by providing the analytical capacity to formulate questions, evaluate arguments, and make decisions in ambiguous situations. As a cornerstone of contemporary education, it demands the ability to analyze data, derive sound conclusions, and make informed choices. Crucially, its development must occur within the context of specific tasks and situations; it is most effective when paired with creative thinking and applied directly to problem-solving (Huitt, 1998).

In architectural pedagogy, critical thinking should be nurtured through reflection and argumentation, such as during studio project discussions. Critical reflection is indispensable for evaluating the alignment between an architectural intention and its visual or spatial representation. This mode of thinking empowers students to formulate distinct design positions, justify material or typological choices, and engage meaningfully with context.

The integration of graphic design and digital tools into the curriculum serves as an effective conduit for connecting the visual and critical components of architectural education. When working within graphic design software, students must actively select and organize information, reflect on presentation methods, and systematically transform visual data to align with an architectural concept. An essential, non-negotiable element of this process is critical reflection, which provides vital feedback and strengthens future strategic thinking. Within higher education, critical thinking is increasingly treated as a mechanism for elevating professional practice rather than merely accumulating knowledge. Reflection is an integral component of learning that underpins planning, decision-making, and evaluation. Consequently, a reflective approach fosters greater student autonomy, enabling individuals to assess their own work, cognitive patterns, and applied strategies.

In professional education, critical reflection becomes a vehicle for self-evaluation, understanding complex visions, and cultivating professional expertise (Smith, 2011). In this sense, graphic design becomes not only a technical skill but also a pedagogical tool that fosters the abstract, argumentative, and visual modes of thinking essential to the architectural profession.

Methodology

The main objective of this article is to present, theoretically anchor, and subsequently critically evaluate an innovative teaching model that integrates graphic design into architectural education. The text aims to demonstrate how the systematic connection of digital tools with visual production develops not only students' technical competencies but also their critical thinking, aesthetic sensibility, and capacity for clear spatial communication.

The paper is structured to transition from theoretical foundations to specific didactic conclusions. The subsequent section, Theoretical Overview, provides a theoretical framework regarding the significance of visual and critical thinking in graphic design education and its specific role within architectural education. This chapter interprets the processes of visual perception and the interpretation of architectural ideas. Concurrently, it analyzes critical reflection as an essential tool for evaluating the relationship between authorial intent and its final graphic representation. This is followed by the Methodology chapter, which describes the actual structure of the teaching model implemented within the Presentation Techniques course and its sequence of thematic modules that connect work in Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe InDesign with the development of conceptual architectural thinking. At the same time, this section clarifies the implementation of a SWOT analysis as the primary strategic tool for reflecting on the didactic effectiveness of the course.

In the Results and Discussion section, specific findings arising from the conducted analysis are presented and interpreted. Here, the text analyzes in detail the internal factors of the model, such as the development of student autonomy, as well as its weaknesses, namely high time demands and varying initial digital skills. The results are further discussed within the broader context of contemporary external challenges.

Based on these analytical findings, the Recommendations for Further Pedagogical Practice chapter formulates practical proposals for future pedagogical application. Attention is paid to optimizing student workload, balancing digital and analog techniques, and a conceptual proposal to extend the course to a full academic year. The entire study concludes with a concise overview in the Conclusion chapter, which synthesizes key insights and confirms the contribution of graphic design to the modernization of architectural education.

Teaching Model and Practical Example

The teaching model implemented within the Presentation Techniques course utilizes digital tools to foster creativity, technical competencies, and the professional growth of students in the fields of architecture and urbanism. Emphasis is placed not only on visual and critical thinking but also on communication and a sustainable approach to visual production. The curriculum aims to develop a comprehensive skill set, ranging from mastering graphic design software and understanding the principles of visual communication and composition to articulating architectural ideas through high-quality graphic outputs.

The pedagogy is centered around creatively guided, student-focused activities. Each student engages with assignments that progress from the initial brief and concept creation to the final visual execution in a selected graphic editor. Throughout this process, continuous and individualized evaluation plays a critical role. The anticipated outcomes encompass the acquisition and refinement of digital skills, the capacity for expressive visual articulation, and the enhancement of visual literacy.

Within the course, digital tools, specifically professional industry-standard software such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe InDesign, play a pivotal role. The objective extends beyond mere software proficiency; it focuses on comprehending the logic of visual communication and cultivating the ability to translate an architectural intention into a clear, aesthetic, and well-structured format. Each editor contributes uniquely to the learning process, forming an interconnected technological ecosystem. Within this framework, Adobe Photoshop is essential for raster image manipulation, including photo editing, visualization post-production, digital collages, and atmospheric layering. This environment enables students to effectively establish mood and work with material textures, lighting, and spatial context. Progressing from pixels to lines, Adobe Illustrator develops proficiency in vector graphics, thereby supporting clear, precise, and legible visual communication. The vector environment closely aligns with architectural thinking, as it emphasizes line work, structural patterns, composition, and information hierarchy, which students utilize to construct diagrams, analysis schemes, and custom iconography. Finally, Adobe InDesign is dedicated to layout design, page composition, and typography. Its inclusion in the curriculum helps students conceptualize an architectural project as a complex information system, where texts, technical descriptions, drawing scales, and visual elements must be rigorously structured. Ultimately, InDesign develops the vital ability to manage communication within multi-page formats, which is indispensable for creating professional architectural portfolios, competition panels, exhibition boards, and publications.

Together, these tools form a comprehensive system that enables students to plan, organize, and present their ideas in a manner consistent with the professional standards of contemporary architectural practice. By integrating technical graphic functions with spatial artistic thinking, students enhance their visual literacy, refine their capacity to structure complex information, and elevate their overall aesthetic expression.

The inclusion of graphic design software in architectural education is equally vital for the transferability of skills. From a didactic perspective, proficiency in these applications represents a cornerstone of professionalized teaching. It reflects contemporary market demands and the daily operations of architectural offices, where such tools are industry standards. Equipping students to effectively utilize graphic applications facilitates a smoother transition from higher education to professional practice, thereby enhancing their readiness for future employment. The teaching model is structured as a chronological sequence of thematic blocks that complement and build upon one another. Individual modules link digital execution in graphic software with the visual articulation of architectural concepts.

The curriculum design ensures that students systematically progress from raster image manipulation, through vector-based drafting languages, to the ultimate synthesis of multi-page documents and presentation materials. This journey initiates with the basics of bitmap graphics in Adobe Photoshop, a module focusing on understanding raster environments for handling pixel-based data. Here, students familiarize themselves with core principles such as resolution, color modes, layers, masking, retouching, and basic compositional operations, achieving a high degree of control and creativity when managing architectural visualizations [Adobe, n.d.-c]. They learn to synthesize diverse objects, photographs, and backgrounds, while tools for matching color, light, and shadow support the generation of visually coherent compositions. In an architectural context, managing photographic material is essential, as it frequently represents real-world project site contexts, teaching students to discern site atmosphere, interpret space, and reflect on visual clarity. Building directly upon these fundamentals, the photo editing and collage creation module steers layered image manipulation in a creative and conceptual direction. Digital collage-making serves as a traditional architectural methodology that supports rapid visual expression, spatial experimentation, and the shaping of a project's atmosphere. Students engage with perspective grids and advanced compositional arrangements to stylize visualizations so that they transcend mere object representation, becoming narrative vehicles for site atmosphere, urban or landscape relationships, material textures, and social interactions.

The subsequent stage of learning transitions into the vector environment through the basics of vector graphics in Adobe Illustrator, which naturally aligns with architectural thinking due to its high level of abstraction. Students are introduced to line drafting tools, geometric shapes, curves, and typography within the context of information design. Vector graphics facilitate the creation of diagrams, custom iconography, site plans, and analytical maps, which are formats universally employed in architecture to communicate logical and spatial relationships. This module develops an innate sense of graphic rhythm and composition, alongside the capacity to wield a concise, precise, and unambiguous visual language. Advancing further, the vector art design module maximizes the capabilities of Adobe Illustrator to create precise vector illustrations suitable for branding, iconography, presentation posters, and digital portfolios. Students master advanced tools such as the Pen tool for smooth line work and utilize live preview functions for immediate feedback on applied graphic effects. Precise alignment and distribution features enable the systematic organization of complex layout compositions. Furthermore, Illustrator allows students to digitize hand-drawn raster sketches, converting them into crisp, editable vector paths that scale infinitely without loss of quality [Adobe, n.d.-a]. This software refines the flexibility of the visual language crucial for information architecture, allowing students to navigate fluidly between abstract concept diagrams and highly descriptive construction details.

Having mastered both bitmap and vector languages, students advance to layout design and page composition in the basics of multi-page document design using Adobe InDesign. This module introduces fundamental typographic principles, structural grid systems, hierarchical information layout, pagination, and the visual interplay between text and image. Adobe InDesign provides the structural engine for creating and compiling sophisticated documents for both print and digital distribution, ensuring clear and aesthetically balanced content presentation. This path culminates in the brochure design module, an advanced layout segment that enables students to import and embed high-resolution graphics and vector assets from Photoshop and Illustrator, leveraging Creative Cloud libraries for efficient project management. Students utilize InDesign to compile comprehensive brochures, architectural competition panels, exhibition boards, and professional portfolios, managing the entire workflow from asset organization to optimization for diverse publishing formats [Adobe, n.d.-b]. Within architectural practice, this capacity to synthesize texts, technical descriptions, scales, and imagery into multi-page documents is paramount for successful client communication, competitive bids, and professional self-presentation.

The final phase of the educational model shifts toward output execution, starting with content preparation and production for the print environment. This module addresses the technical realities of physical production, including output formats, color profiles (CMYK vs. RGB), soft proofing, file exporting methods, and print pre-flight checks. Emphasis is strictly placed on technical precision and the prevention of production errors. Familiarity with print specifications reflects the professional realities of architects, who must regularly deliver flawless physical competition panels, exhibition drawings, and bound project documentation. Concurrently, the final module is dedicated to content preparation and production for the digital environment, focusing on digital-first presentation strategies. Students learn to optimize exports for high-resolution displays, converting their graphic collateral into responsive formats suitable for web platforms, PDF presentations, and interactive digital portfolios. Recognizing that the digital realm imposes distinct parameters regarding contrast ratios, typographic scaling, and asset sizing provides students with vital, future-proof experience for modern professional practice.

SWOT Analysis of the Teaching Model

Given the nature of graphic design instruction within architectural education, it is essential to evaluate the presented model not only in terms of its content structure but also within broader didactic, institutional, and professional contexts. For this purpose, a SWOT analysis was selected, enabling a structured description of internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) while simultaneously identifying external influences (opportunities and threats) that affect the Presentation Techniques course within the Architecture and Urbanism study program. The analysis serves as a diagnostic tool for the teaching model while establishing a framework for future pedagogical recommendations and strategic innovations.

A SWOT analysis is a valuable instrument for assessing the internal and external environments of an educational project. Originating from strategic planning, it helps define objectives, identify relevant variables, and determine which pedagogical aspects must be developed or protected. Strengths represent internal resources and competencies that support objective achievement, whereas weaknesses point to barriers or shortcomings that may hinder effective functioning. Opportunities relate to favorable external trends, while threats refer to environmental factors that complicate curricular implementation (Sabbaghi & Vaidyanathan, 2004).

The structural evaluation of the teaching model based on the SWOT matrix yielded comprehensive findings regarding its educational environment. In terms of internal pedagogical assets, the primary strengths of the model lie in its logical modular progression. This clear structure systematically guides students from raster image manipulation, through vector-based outputs, to the final synthesis of multi-page documents, supporting the progressive acquisition of complex digital skills. Furthermore, these acquired graphic competencies offer direct curricular application, allowing students to immediately implement their skills within parallel design studios. This integration of design and theory effectively merges digital software training with artistic and conceptual thinking, which substantially enhances overall student visual literacy. Additionally, the reliance on project-based learning, combined with individualized guidance, successfully fosters student autonomy, creativity, and self-reflection while realistically simulating real-world professional scenarios. On the other hand, the model exhibits internal curricular limitations and distinct weaknesses. The instruction is exceptionally time-intensive, creating high cognitive and time demands by requiring students to simultaneously master complex software interfaces, typography, visual communication principles, and compositional rules. These difficulties are compounded by temporal constraints, as the course is compressed exclusively into the winter semester, raising the risk of student cognitive overload. Moreover, significant disparities in baseline skills and initial digital competencies often lead to an uneven pace of learning progress within the classroom. Finally, the curriculum places severe pressure and high demands on the faculty, requiring advanced expertise in both professional graphic design and architectural thinking, which represents a highly rare combination of academic competencies.

Beyond these internal dynamics, the evaluation mapped external strategic development and environmental shifts. The analysis identified vital opportunities, particularly in the professionalization of deliverables. The growing industry importance of visual communication in architecture and urbanism continuously amplifies the market demand for professional-quality student portfolios and presentation panels. There is also great potential for the integration of innovative media, where convergence with contemporary digital media and interactive platforms offers substantial room for future course modernization. However, these prospects must be balanced against pressing external threats and environmental risks. Technological volatility represents a major challenge, as the rapid evolution of industry software and shifting technological standards require constant, demanding curriculum updates. This volatility is worsened by an institutional and financial burden, driven by the increasing commercialization and rising costs of software licenses. Socioeconomic imbalances also pose a threat, since unequal student access to high-performance hardware and technical equipment can disrupt instructional equity. Furthermore, AI and automation disruptions, specifically the rapid emergence of generative AI and automated tools, threaten to fundamentally transform traditional approaches to visual content generation. Ultimately, a persistent risk of technical reductionism exists, as the course faces the danger of being reduced by students or institutions to purely mechanical software training, which would critically undermine the essential critical and conceptual dimensions of architectural design.

Overall, the SWOT analysis indicates that the presented teaching model offers a robust methodological and professional foundation highly relevant to contemporary architectural practice. However, maximizing its potential requires careful pedagogical curation, a balanced student workload, and proactive strategic planning to leverage internal strengths while mitigating systemic risks.

Results and Discussion

The application of the SWOT methodology to the examined teaching model brought critical insights into its internal pedagogical dynamics, allowing the discussion to shift from what the model achieves to how it must adapt within contemporary higher education. Regarding the analysis of internal dynamics, a primary strength identified is the development of student autonomy and conceptual architectural thinking. Thanks to the integration of Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe InDesign into a coherent pedagogical sequence of eight thematic modules, students ceased to view software as a mere technical tool, utilizing it instead as a medium for critical reflection and the visual interpretation of spatial ideas. These results demonstrate that transitioning from bitmap graphics through vector layouts to multi-page print or digital documentation significantly increases students' visual literacy and capacity for clear visual communication. Conversely, a significant internal weakness revealed by the analysis is the high time demand imposed on both students and educators. The dual necessity of mastering complex software interfaces while simultaneously resolving advanced architectural and typographic compositions often leads to student overload. Furthermore, the findings highlight substantial differences in students' initial digital competencies, a variability that forces educators to balance basic technical instruction with advanced conceptual guidance across two computer labs and seven teaching groups of 20 students each, which occasionally hinders the overall pace of instruction.

When examining the external context and professional relevance, the teaching model opens vital opportunities for the professionalization of future architects. In contemporary architectural practice, professional success depends heavily on the presentation of portfolios, competition proposals, and urban studies. The curriculum directly responds to these market demands by equipping students with essential graphic skills. However, a synthesized view reveals a critical friction within the curriculum; the collision between high internal time demands and the pressing need for professional output suggests that the current course format is severely constrained by its limited timeframe.

This temporal limitation is further complicated by technological imperatives and the rapid rise of AI automation. The discussion regarding these technological threats underscores that graphic education must shift even further away from mechanical software operation toward deep critical and analytical thinking. While artificial intelligence can effortlessly generate visual outputs, it inherently lacks the capacity for genuine authorial intent and deep spatial understanding. Consequently, the ultimate strength of this educational model lies precisely in its ability to support critical reflection on the relationship between an idea and its representation, which remains its most valuable and unreplicable asset in the modern technological era.

Recommendations for Further Pedagogical Practice

Based on the structural evaluation of the graphic design teaching model within the Presentation Techniques course, several strategic recommendations can be formulated to optimize instructional effectiveness, support students’ professional development, and ensure a balanced integration of technical and conceptual competencies.

The first key area focuses on the preservation of the modular course structure, where the logical progression from bitmap graphics, through vector outputs, to multi-page documents enables students to systematically build their skills; therefore, it is highly recommended to

preserve this foundational structure while continuously updating individual modules in response to software evolution and contemporary trends in visual communication.

Next, to address the enhancement of individualized student support, given the substantial disparities in students' baseline digital skills, introducing targeted consultation sessions is advisable, ensuring that less experienced students do not fall behind, while more advanced students are granted the pedagogical space for creative experimentation and the cultivation of a distinct personal style.

Furthermore, the active integration of reflection and critical thinking dictates that teaching strategies should actively promote not only technical proficiency but also the capacity to critically evaluate both personal and peer visual decisions, meaning that curricular adjustments should include peer-review assessments, structured discussions on aesthetics, and critical reflections on how visual presentation choices directly function in relation to an architectural concept.

Regarding balancing digital and analog pedagogies, to prevent visual thinking from being reduced solely to digital execution, it is recommended to incorporate short assignments utilizing traditional media, such as hand-drawn sketching, analog collage-making, or physical model building, as these exercises help sustain vital spatial and conceptual understanding.

Additionally, a strong focus on transferability and professional relevance ensures that the curriculum regularly emphasizes how acquired graphic skills apply directly to real-world architectural practice, which includes aligning assignments with the specific technical demands of producing competition panels, professional portfolios, exhibition boards, and interactive digital presentations.

Finally, the optimization of student workload and extension of course duration is essential to maintain educational quality and prevent student cognitive overload, meaning that demanding graphic tasks should be deconstructed into smaller, manageable steps supported by continuous assessment, allowing students to acquire and apply complex knowledge without excessive stress. Most crucially, it is recommended to extend the Presentation Techniques course to span the entire academic year rather than a single winter semester, as a year-long time allocation would provide the necessary duration for deeper mastery of digital tools, a comprehensive enhancement of visual literacy, and the organic integration of graphic workflows into core architectural thinking. Furthermore, extending the course would encourage experimentation, allow for thorough reflection on creative decisions, and offer opportunities to execute elaborate projects that more accurately simulate the realities of contemporary architectural practice.

Conclusion

Integrating graphic design into architecture education through the Presentation Techniques course is a key step to modernize teaching in Architecture and Urbanism. By connecting visual and critical thinking with digital tools, learning software becomes more than just a technical skill. It becomes a real way to communicate spatial and conceptual ideas clearly. Visual thinking helps students understand architectural visions and materials. At the same time, critical thinking encourages them to reflect on their design choices and justify both the aesthetic and practical sides of their projects.

The methodology used in this study, based on a SWOT analysis of the teaching model, showed that the step-by-step order of the modules works very well. The course guides students from editing raster images in Adobe Photoshop, to vector design in Adobe Illustrator, and finally to creating multi-page documents in Adobe InDesign. This structure directly copies the demands of real architectural practice. However, the results also showed some limits alongside strengths like student independence, artistic feeling, and professional readiness. The main challenges are that the course takes a lot of time, which can overload students when packed into a single semester, and that students start with very different digital skills. In today's digital era of automation and generative AI, the ability to critically think about the relationship between an idea and its visual form is the most valuable and irreplaceable part of the course.

Based on these findings, we created key recommendations for future teaching. To keep the quality of education high, it is important to break down difficult tasks into smaller steps. Most importantly, extending the Presentation Techniques course to a full academic year would give students enough time to learn digital processes deeply and connect them with their studio work. We also recommend offering individual help through consultations to balance the differences between students. Teachers should use peer-review to encourage group discussions and balance digital work with short, traditional art exercises like sketching or making collages. This complete approach ensures that students do not just learn how to use software mechanically. Instead, they gain a lasting understanding of visual culture and learn how to present their architectural thinking professionally.

In conclusion, the goal of the Presentation Techniques course should not be to teach architecture students how to control complex software. Instead, it should teach them how to think authentically using digital tools. Graphic design is not just about aesthetics or decorating final products. Students should see it as a tool to create their own original visual language for their architectural ideas. This course gives students a valuable ability to turn an abstract vision into a clear creative conversation.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Adapting Personal Development and Growth: Opportunities and Challenges of COVID-19 Psychosocial and Educational Developmental Influences and Conceptual Frameworks

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This research paper emphasizes discussing the different adolescent personal development contexts in Hong Kong, like reshaping psychosocial processes, peer relationships, and educational experiences. As a conscientious pre-social worker, this paper adopted a broad range of human development, which is in line with studying the ages of adolescents and impacts of COVID-19 on their learning for individual and community levels. It adopted many theoretical perspectives, including Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity vs. role confusion, Piaget's formal operational development, Maslow's hierarchy theory (like need for belongingness and self-respect), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (incorporating a neo-ecological perspective on digital micro-systems). This paper applied diverse research methods, like interviews and surveys, that were used to meet the requirements of validated data instruments and triangulation. Besides numerous article and journal reviews, it also involved an online survey involving the secondary student population (n = 46) and a semi-structured interview with a senior registered social worker. Despite the findings of reduced extracurricular activities, cooperation, and social skills among students, as well as increased likelihoods of anxiety and social withdrawal after mask mandates. Nevertheless, it becomes imperative to explore issues related to digital competencies, literacy, and sustainability of hybrid learning among educators, social workers, and students. Through teaching and social learning, it discovered and led to unequal scaffolding, divided learning attention and consciousness, and expanded more digital divides among underprivileged families. Finally, the paper provided social work and educator recommendations in relation to digital equity and social/emotional learning among students.

Keywords: developmental theories, adolescents, digital literacy, psychological problems, social learning

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Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) became a pandemic between late 2019 and early 2023 in Hong Kong (Li et al., 2025). Regarding the Centre for Health Protection (2023), there were 3,106,579 confirmed laboratory diagnoses using nucleic acid tests and rapid antigen tests in Hong Kong. The pandemic has revolutionized discussions concerning human development through the term "new normal." It refers to persistent changes in human development concerning daily living, social engagement, and learning. In Hong Kong, the "new normal" has been evident through the growth of digital learning and technology, the adoption of hybrid working arrangements, and changes in the learning experience of adolescents (Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 2024; Manuti et al., 2022; Selvam et al., 2024; Suvakovic, 2024; The University of Hong Kong, 2020). The increasing trend of online learning was made possible by video conferencing software applications like Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom. It not only promotes collaborative learning but also changes adolescents' participation in hybrid education models (Education Bureau, 2020; Li & Wang, 2024; Nawaz et al., 2024). While the pandemic increased the possibility of some students participating in learning activities flexibly in their families, secondary students, including SEN students, were negatively affected by a lack of digital access, poor digital literacy skills, and inadequate learning support (ACER, 2025; Chanda et al., 2024; Spurava & Kotilainen, 2023). Besides the education transformation, there was an increase in psychosocial stress among secondary students. They reported higher levels of family conflict, lower levels of interpersonal contacts with peers' communication and interaction, and more mental problems formed during the pandemic in different media coverage. Thus, the COVID-19 outbreak had a significant impact on the developmental paths of adolescents in Hong Kong. This article will explore the educational and psychosocial outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school students and its implications for social work (Stheadline, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Research Questions

1. What changes and impacts affect the new normal post-COVID regarding the educational and psychological experience of secondary school students?
2. What lessons can be learned from these developmental influences in preparing social workers to work with children and youth post-pandemic?

Research Methods

The current research has used a combination of mixed research methods, like using the structured literature review with practical reports using the quantitative research methods (i.e., surveys) and incorporating the use of semi-structured interview data (from senior social workers at the management level) to explore post-COVID learning and psychological effects on secondary school learners. This research used online survey and invited Hong Kong secondary school students (n = 46) in October and November 2025. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was also conducted in October 2025 with a senior registered social worker from the Society for Community Organization (SoCO). Survey results have been analyzed by using the method of descriptive statistics and a provided discussion section. Insights gained from the qualitative part of the research (interviews and literature) have been analyzed and used to draw conclusions regarding adolescents' developmental needs after the pandemic. This research paper concerns the ethical consideration and moral issue. Everyone is required to agree and participate in this research.

Details of Data Analysis

These pilot survey responses were subject to descriptive analysis. The analysis was intended to reveal commonalities in the respondents' agreement and perception of change regarding their psychosocial and educational experience. The interview (qualitative research method) was combined with those derived from the literature and correlated with the theories that formed the basis of the research.

Developmental Concepts

In order to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic's "new normal" on the development of adolescents, this study employs the three developmental perspectives of Erikson, Piaget, and Maslow.

Erikson: Identity Versus Role Confusion

According to Erikson's framework, adolescents actively engage in identifying themselves, their values, and their roles through prolonged periods of social interactions and feedback from peers and important people. Peers are secondary socialization and significant others. Identity formation is achieved by exploring areas of interest, clarifying personal goals, and experimenting with various social roles. The creation of an environment that is conducive to developing teenagers' autonomy, emotional resilience, and relational skills would contribute positively to one's wellbeing (Bishop & Keth, 2013; Cherry, 2026; McLeod, 2008, 2025a; Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). On the contrary, social learning through face-to-face interaction that was hindered during the pandemic could have affected identity formation and identity exploration among adolescents due to limited interaction with peers.

Piaget: Formal Operations Stage

The stage of formal operations according to Piaget focuses on the adolescent's ability to think in abstract ways, form hypotheses, and use logic and moral reasoning. The use of learning systems that adopt a virtual platform can result in the development of some of these cognitive abilities in the form of asking critical questions and moral reasoning in adolescents. However, when educational programs adopt a virtual format, there is a physical absence of the interactive component necessary for effective reflection. With regard to psychosocial development, the adoption of virtual learning platforms may expand one's knowledge base but limit empathic communication and interpretation.

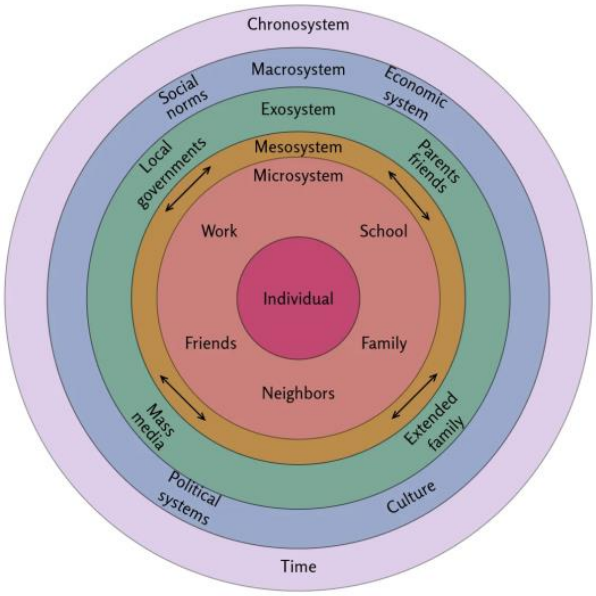
Maslow: Belongingness and Self-Esteem Needs (Psychological)

According to Maslow's perspectives, adolescents need belonging, acceptance, and recognition in order to foster feelings of self-respect and motivation. Social groups are important sites where secondary socialization takes place and relationships other than those formed within the family occur (Madero-Gómez, 2024; McLeod, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d, 2025e; Newport academy, 2024; Trivedi & Mehta, 2019). Group interactions have potential for strengthening personal identity development, providing opportunities for self-expression, and building social and collaborative skills (Ajayi, 2024; Malik & Marwaha, 2023; Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022; Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020). Peers may have collective norms for speech, dress, and behavior (i.e., participating in different extracurricular or society activities, balls, or sports teams; having role models of classmates, etc.). Still, it forms peer pressure or self-comparison.

Adolescents may also have fewer chances to get approval of their emotional expressions and social performance and may feel less socially validated due to the pandemic and distance. All of these developmental and psychological concepts and theories are reflected in the idea that both theories allow for a developmental perspective on the changes caused by COVID-19. It affects adolescent identity formation, cognitive engagement, and belonging and skills and social competence, though some compensated with online communities.

Developmental Concepts (Visual)

Figure 1
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Note. From Bronfenbrenner, 1979

Figure 2
Ecological Theory

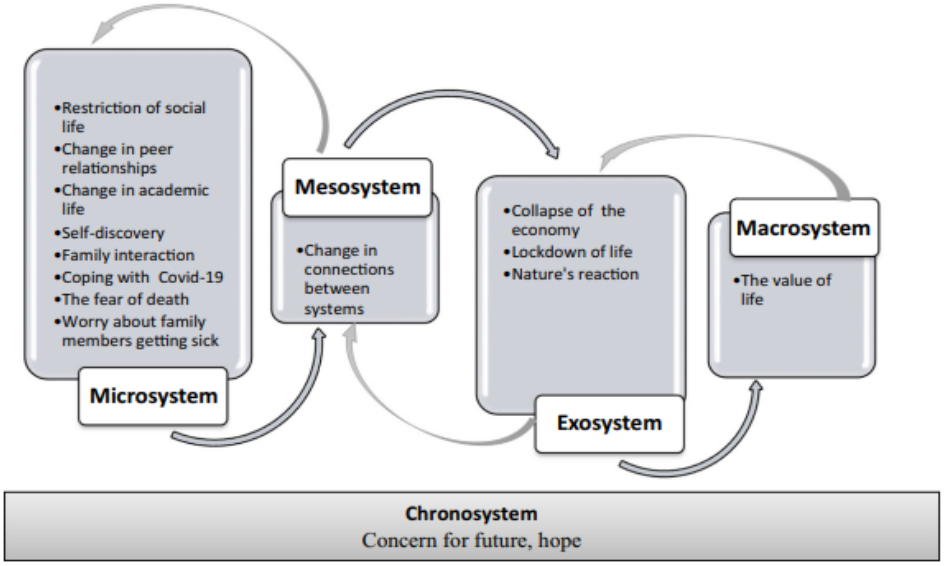


Fig. 2. Potential changes in the lives of adolescents according to Ecological Theory.

Note. From Navarro & Tudge, 2022

Figure 3
Summary of Ecological Theory

- Chronosystem-Transition: The COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak, Adolescence Change Period
- Macrosystem: Different culture, government policy changes, social norms
- Exosystem: indirect social structure, media platform, extended family
- Mesosystem: interconnection with others, like educators, parents, peers, and even others' family relatives.
- Microsystem: immediate environment, school, peers, family, etc.
- Individual Development

Ecological and Neo-Ecological Approaches for Elucidating Contextual Processes

The theoretical framework to explain contextual processes is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and neo-ecological theory. According to the former, adolescents' personal development is shaped by interactions between various systems, like family, school, peer group, and community, which affect adolescents' development both directly and indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Disruption in the social systems can be a catalyst for further developmental risk factors. Likewise, neo-ecology arouses an individual's attention to the ways in which interrelations among systems affect results regarding role shifts, resource availability, and relations (Navarro & Tudge, 2022). Finally, online education can be viewed as a system transformation of education and authentic program or activity existence. It makes changes in adolescents' or secondary school students' microsystems (like peer interaction, everyday habits, involvement from family members, and community activities). In other words, the digital world might become a part of the developmental ecology of adolescents, taking the form of a modified microsystem. In light of the above, the post-COVID developmental issue discussed herein cannot be treated as something isolated happening at the individual level. It can be social groups, academic learning groups, or even the educational transformation opportunities, challenges, or precautions.

Literature Review

Effects on Psychosocial Development (Social Competence Opportunities and Challenges)

In this section, the main effects on psychosocial development, it specifically covers how the post-COVID environment affected social competence, peer interaction, sense of belonging, emotion regulation, and identity formation among adolescents. Junge et al. (2020) (Figure 5) define social competence as adolescents' abilities to engage effectively with peers and adults. Erikson (1968) discussed adolescence as about identity and role confusion, where identity is formed through social interaction. COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions disrupted personal developmental processes because prolonged quarantine and social distancing significantly reduced opportunities for learning peer communication and genuine and face-to-face peer engagement (Chan, 2023).

Lower Participation in Extracurricular Activities and Developmental Theories for Peer Interactions

Throughout the post-COVID era, adolescents indicated the decline in extracurricular activities and constraints on social interactions had hindered their ability to build social competence and

social bonds with peers. My own form 5 experience as a campus TV journalist, interviewed Mr. Ho, an alumnus, and provided chances of hosting with other young journalists. I can demonstrate good interaction skills with alumni and young journalists. Secondary school students build social competence and relationships through informal interactions like extracurricular activities (playing & doing), leadership, and service learning activities, even discovering self-interest and self-exploration (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Hanley et al., 2022; Manis & Stewart, 2024; Pekkanen, 2024; Sawyer et al., 2023; Society for Community Organization, 2023; Ta Kung Pao, 2023). Essentially, extracurricular activity participation serves as a social environment in which adolescents can engage in conversations, negotiate, collaborate, and lead others. However, with the suspension of extracurricular activities, adolescents lacked an important channel for developing social competence. When it comes to personal development, social competence within peer groups is fostered not only through learning processes but also through constant participation, observation, imitation, and feedback. If adolescents have fewer chances to experience all these things, then it might be difficult for adolescents to return to face-to-face settings once they are made available. Secondary school students who prefer to take on roles of class representative, different teams, or society members may be understood as the collaborators, members, or liaisons; their identities are recognized within the school community, supporting identity development and achievement. Social competence and behavioral wellness of adolescents were influenced both during and following the period of disruptions caused by the pandemic, especially for the SEN students.

Under Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, learning occurs through the "zone of proximal development" and "scaffolding," which emphasize collaborative learning and social interactions. Since school closure and extracurricular activities were suspended, there were fewer opportunities for stress relief and social networking. This made the adolescents struggle when in-person schooling recommenced (Chan, 2023; Fang et al., 2023; Society for Community Organization, 2021, 2022, 2023). Additionally, Law (2020, 2022) have shown that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic worsened behavioral issues, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and social developmental issues among secondary school students, especially SEN students (Wenweipo, 2023a).

Specifically, Hong Kong Lutheran Social Services undertook a survey (n = 1051) among secondary school students. The results of this survey revealed that 62% of secondary school students became less willing to engage in socializing, 71% of the respondents became less involved in participating in extracurricular activities, and almost 50% experienced fear and nervousness towards social gatherings since masks had been banned. The pandemic encouraged social isolation, restricted interaction through nonverbal communication skills, and inhibited identity development and emotional resilience. According to the Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977) and Guy-Evans (2024), teenagers acquire social skills through observing peer behavior and imitating their actions. The typical socialization process was greatly hampered. Adolescents reported feelings of being awkward (identifying faces wearing masks), anxious (social anxiety, isolation), shy (embarrassment with facial expressions, lack of confidence), or hidden upon returning to school (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, 2023a, 2023b; Stheadline, 2021; Wenweipo, 2023a, 2023b). Ms. Ng (RSW) stressed that adolescents should be willing to get along with their peers and have a desire for different activities. Adolescents learn to take personal responsibility and make decisions independently. Self-identity strengthening and gaining diversified experiences become crucial before entering young adulthood. From a developmental perspective, it could view such experiences as interruptions in the social feedback process necessary for identity rehearsal and self-esteem

formation. If adolescents experience anxiety or social withdrawal, the probability of engaging in social rehearsals diminishes. From a developmental perspective, it could view such experiences as interruptions in the social feedback process necessary for identity rehearsal and self-esteem formation. If adolescents experience anxiety or social withdrawal, the probability of engaging in social rehearsals diminishes.

Another study by CUHK's Institute for Health Equity (Prof. Esther's Research) conducted a survey (n = 1095) among secondary students from twelve schools in 2021 (Ho, 2022a, 2022b). More than half of the participants showed the same emotions during and after the peak of COVID-19. 34.4% of the participants experienced increased stress/anxiety; 16.6% experienced increased despair, while 20.3% of respondents had more trouble sleeping. In contrast to their previous emotions, 21.6% of the participants were less relaxed, 31.1% had decreased confidence about the future, and 20.6% were less happy (Ho, 2022a, 2022b). Face-to-face interaction is essential to build interpersonal relationships, social skills, nuanced feedback, and relational empathy (Chiu, 2023).

However, some individuals who are shy might enjoy these interactions since they may serve as a form of escape and shield against negative social interactions and anxiety. However, this was limited for personal growth. In addition to individual social skills, there might be other impacts on the cooperation of secondary students. For example, based on the research conducted by the University of Hong Kong (2020) research group led by Professor Nancy Law, a comparison was made between secondary school students regarding their collaboration and problem-solving skills before (n = 705) and after the epidemic (n = 682). According to Law (2022) study, it was found that secondary school students' collaborative problem-solving skills. It included social skills such as supported working, partnership awareness, mutual commitment, valued partnership, and cooperation and shared goals, were decreased slightly in 2021 after the pandemic (Law, 2022). This is consistent with my observation of community education as an undergraduate student, where secondary students did not have many opportunities for informal learning under hybrid learning environments.

Issues of collaboration problems may affect students' feelings of belongingness and peer relationships, which are highly related to their emotional well-being and academic engagement (Wentzel, 2017). The impacts of such developmental issues on the acquisition of adolescent social skills require further research. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory highlights several developmental issues where the interaction of different environments, including the home, school, and community, is affected by the pandemic at once. Adolescents had to endure social isolation and peer interactions or just family dimensions (living alone in confinement). Many adolescents exhibit low social competencies, collaboration abilities, and poor peer relationships. They do not necessarily have to be conscious of body language, facial expressions, and communication skills. However, communication and social skills are necessary for further development (Epoch News HK, 2022; Ming Pao, 2022a, 2022b; Stheadline, 2020, 2022).

Moving on from socialization and social skills, PSMU and a growing amount of time spent in front of the screen emerge as factors that negatively influence students' social well-being and mental health. The first research question we proposed to answer was as follows: "My online/social media usage habits that I developed previously still influence my sleep and mood." "Compared to previous life, how much more time am I spending on social media/the internet/playing games daily without studying?" 37 respondents (65.1%) significantly increased the time of use (the score of self-assessment is 4–5 out of 5). 9 respondents (53.5%)

state that it can be difficult to regulate excessive time spent using social media or internet games (the score of self-assessment is 1–3 out of 5). As regards the total screen use time, the same situation occurs. Question: “Do I have a social media/internet game usage habit that is formed and that I am still maintaining because of the long period of distance learning?” 31 respondents (65.1%) agreed on obvious and discovery situations.

More secondary school students checked various social media accounts (Facebook/Instagram) to observe the peers' social lives, which triggered high anxiety and excitability, together with social comparison. In many cases, adolescents tried to expand their online “friends” and “Moments” (朋友圈) and created many “weak-tie” relationships with people they knew less. In this case, the pattern of communication may be changed from “strong ties” (acquaintances, family members, core friend group) to hybrid mode or relationship. Regarding Law (2022), symptoms of internet addiction were rising among secondary school students from 8% to 20% between 2019 and 2021. About 15% of the Primary 5 pupils had experienced such issues in 2021. More junior secondary school male students showed symptoms of internet addiction and game addiction (Law, 2022). Increased use of the internet intensified anxiety, social comparison, and addiction risks (Hafiz & Aljadani, 2022). Adolescents often used digital space to seek identity formation (game satisfaction). According to Erikson (1968), some important terms related to the identity issue include identity formulation and identity confusion. These phenomena reflected the fact that adolescents used maladaptive coping strategies to cope with the lack of offline relationships. Digital space becomes an important platform and encourages online identity creation and formation. Finally, it can have hybrid world, virtual communities, and online identity formation.

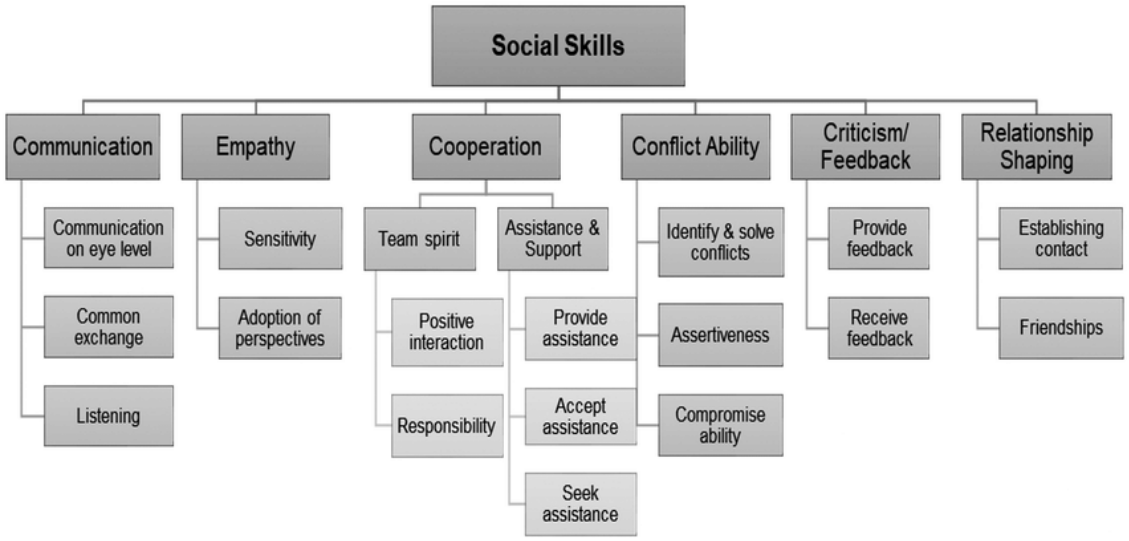
More adolescents are showing a growing interest in moving towards virtual communities as a way to preserve social relationships and opportunities (such as digital marketing, game rivals, game moderators, key opinion leaders, social media influencers, etc.). Virtual communities still provided the continuity of connection and additional opportunities for engagement (content creator and digital marketing). It could create a different type of identity exploration and expression. As far as digital identity experimentation, Steele et al. (2024) noted that adolescents can play around with various identities available on different digital platforms, such as video games and social media, getting feedback and watching people's reactions in real time. Adolescents have the opportunity to explore identities and experiment without any permanent damage. In addition, Adeane and Stasiak (2024) provide research on how adolescents learn from the role models via observation in the context of social media influencers adapting traditional mechanisms of social learning for digital reality. Besides, Nagata et al. (2025) gives examples of celebrities that disclose information related to their mental illnesses, which is crucial in order to reduce stigma in the adolescent population. When public figures disclose their problems, adolescents perceive the discussion of these issues as a normal phenomenon.

Generally, post-COVID-19 impacts secondary school students' development of physical and social competence, social skills, formation of peer relationships, and collaborative skills. However, there might be an opening for the use of social media for virtual community expression. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), an online community would represent another microsystem in the adolescent’s life system.

Figure 4
Integrated Literature Review



Figure 5
Social Competence as Adolescents' Abilities to Engage Effectively With Peers and Adults



Note. From Junge et al. (2020)

Data Analysis

Table 1
Regular Demographic/Informational Table (Participants' Age)

Participants Age	Total Participants	Percentage
9–11	0	0%
12	1	2.2%
13–15	2	4.3%
16–18	6	13%
19–22	24	52.2%
22 or above	13	28.3%
Total	46	100%

Table 2
Regular Demographic/Informational Table (Gender)

Gender	Total Participants	Percentage
Male	20	50%
Female	23	43.5%
Others	3	6.5%
Total	46	100%

Table 3
Regular Demographic/Informational Table (Education Level)

Education Level	Total Participants	Percentages
Secondary School Students	5	10.87%
Tertiary Education Students	5	10.87%
Undergraduate Students	28	60.87%
Postgraduate	7	15.22%
Students	1	2.17%
Others		
Total	46	100%

Table 4
Part A. Post COVID-19 Developmental Impacts (Survey)

Question: Whether is agree with statement

	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Derivation (SD)	Range (Min & Max)
Personal Development					
Compared to before and after the pandemic, I participate less actively in extracurricular activities or club activities (i.e., society).	2.80	3 (13 Participants)	3	1.31	4
My internet/social media usage habits developed during online learning still affect my sleep and mood.	3.35	3.5 (14 Participants)	4	1.25	4

Compared to before and after the pandemic, the school's support for digital learning (devices, networks, platforms, and teaching methods) is adequate.	3.58	4 (20 Participants)	4	1.04	4
The school's support for digital learning (device lending, network, platform usage guidance) is sufficient.	3.48	4 (22 Participants)	4	1.10	4
I think the school provides sufficient support in digital learning skills such as information searching, verifying authenticity, and cybersecurity.	2.95	4 (Participants)	3	1.23	4
I feel the school provides sufficient support for digital learning (like Zoom, Google Meet, and Google Classroom).	3.23	4 (20 Participants)	4	1.22	4
I find it more difficult to concentrate or keep up in class.	3.41	3 (13 Participants)	3.5	1.26	4
Social Interaction					
After face-to-face classes resumed, I feel uneasy or nervous about socializing with classmates face-to-face.	3.09	3 (13 Participants)	3	1.30	4
I feel my social skills (such as speaking, listening, and interpreting others' expressions) have deteriorated due to the pandemic.	3.04	3 (15 Participants)	3	1.28	4
After masks were no longer required, I worried about how others would judge my appearance or expressions.	2.76	1 (15 Participants)	3	1.47	4

Emotional Regulation					
Compared to before and after the pandemic, I find it more difficult to concentrate or keep up with the pace of learning in class.	3.15	4 (15 Participants)	3	1.27	4
My family has provided ample emotional support and communication during (and after) the pandemic.	3.20	3 & 4 (both 14 Participants)	3	1.17	4
I am willing to participate in face-to-face group sessions (social skills, emotional management, learning support, etc.) offered by the school or social workers.	2.91	3 (14 Participants)	3	1.16	4
Social Media Addiction					
I feel I have a tendency to overuse social media/online games and find it difficult to regulate myself.	3.43	4 (14 Participants)	4	1.23	4

Figure 6

Data Visualization on Adolescents' Social Media Addiction Issue

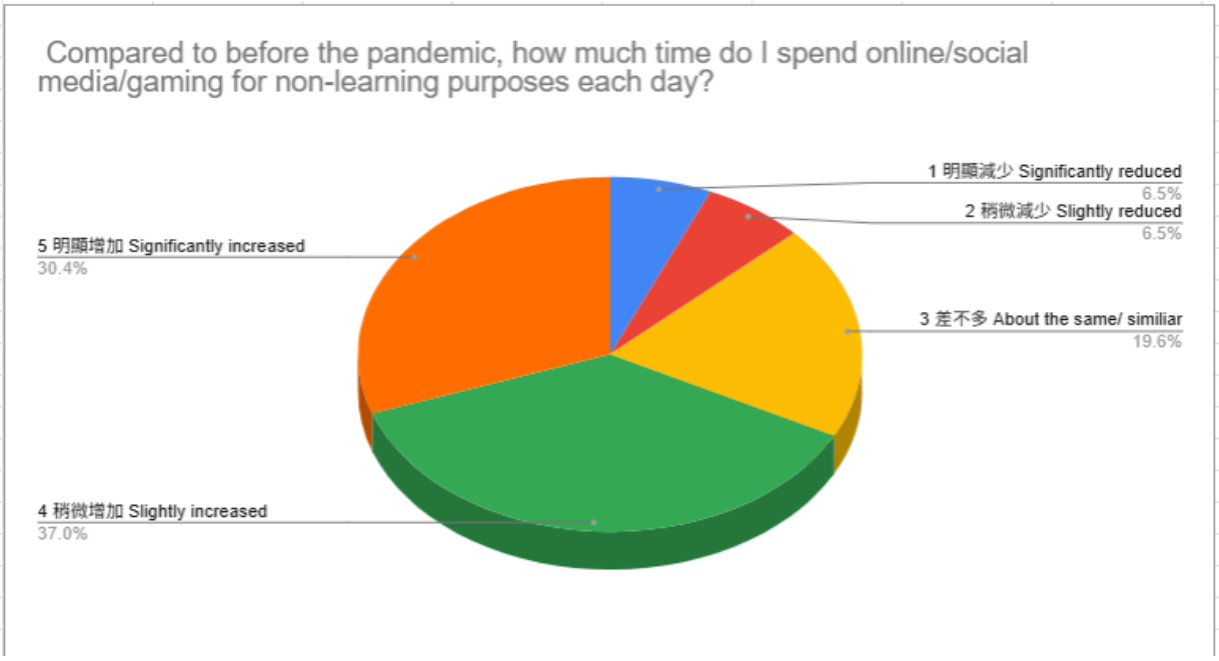


Figure 7
Data Visualization on Adolescents' Social Media Addiction Issue (2)

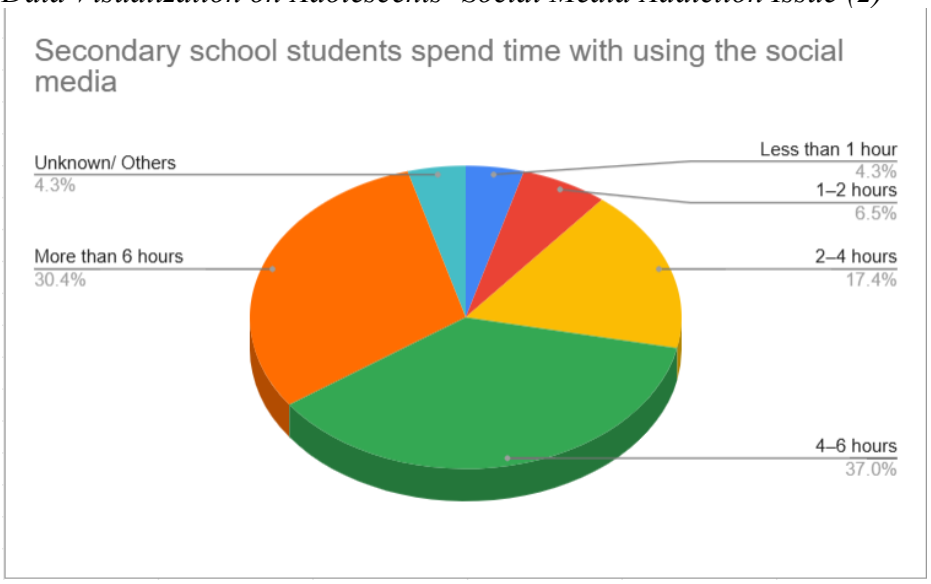


Figure 8
Social Media/Game Use

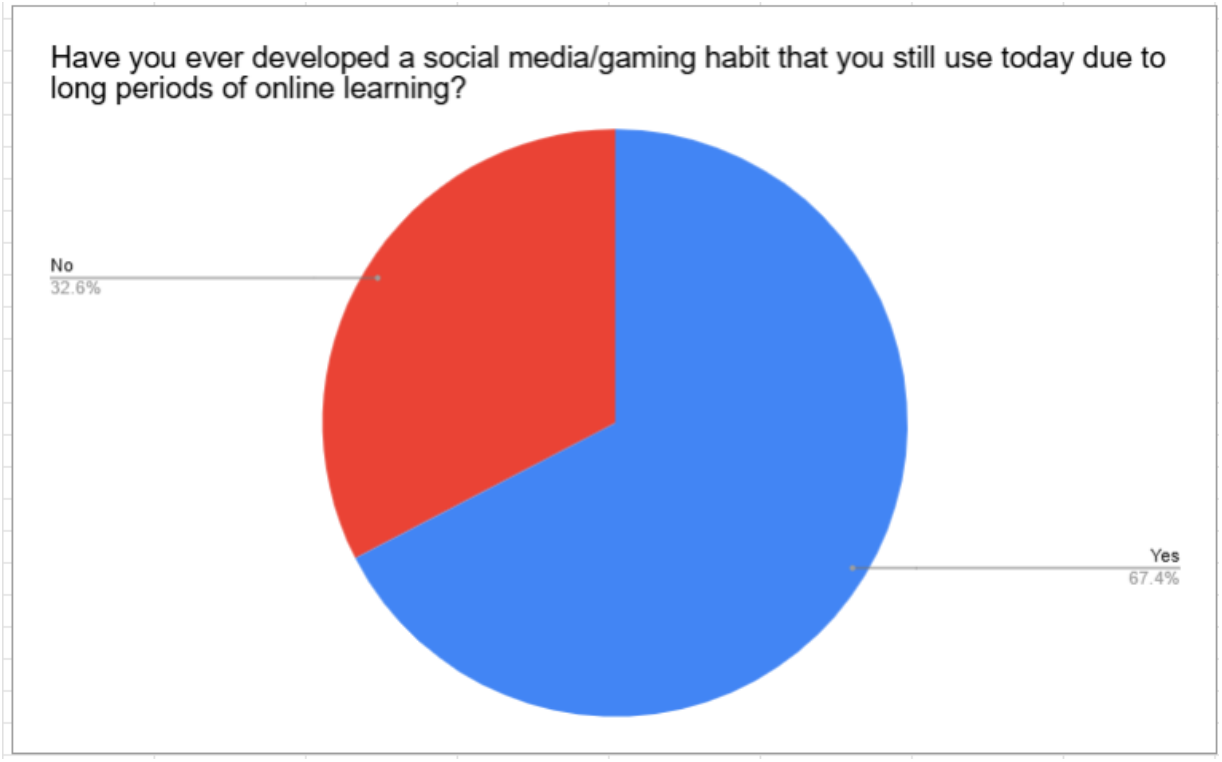


Table 5
Changes Between Pandemic and Post-pandemic

Statement/ Situations	Yes	No
A. Difficulty falling asleep/disrupted sleep schedule	25 (54.3%)	21 (45.7%)
B. More frequent personal feelings of anxiety/tension/depression	26 (56.5%)	20 (43.5%)
C. More frequent conflicts with family members due to internet use	15 (32.6%)	31 (67.4%)
D. More easily affected by online messages	24 (52.2%)	22 (47.8%)
E. Less social interaction (including communication) with classmates	24 (52.2%)	22 (47.8%)
F. None of the above or the same as above	9 (19.6%)	37 (80.4%)
Others		

Table 6
Collaboration and Generic Skills Analysis

	Mean	**Mode**	**Median**	**Standard Derivation (SD)**	**Range (Min & Max)**
Compared to before and after the pandemic, my teamwork and problem-solving abilities (division of labor, commitment, coordination) have improved.	3.11	3 (26 Participants)	3	1.00	4
Compared to before and after the pandemic, my clarity regarding my self-identity and future goals (e.g., further education/career) has improved.	2.65	3 (16 Participants)	3	1.20	4
Compared to before and after the pandemic, my learning motivation and self-discipline (time management, proactive review) have improved.	2.78	3 (15 Participants)	3	1.21	4

Note. For each statement below, please rate it on a 1–5 scale (1 = significantly decreased, 5 = significantly increased).

Table 7
Challenges and How Educators and Social Workers Support

Primary challenge	Requested support (school / social workers)	Example responses	Count
Social / face-to-face reintegration	More extracurriculars activities, organized social activities, gradual exposure, small-group mixers, opportunities for shy students	• “要嘗試變回和同學實體相處” • “希望學校提供更多課外活動” • “增加更多課外活動” • “提升學生相處時間”	14
Communication skills decline	Workshops on conversation skills, peer-mentoring, guided social groups, one-on-one support	• “身邊後輩溝通能力下降” • “與他人溝通的技巧生疏了”	6
Academic catch-up / learning progress	Remedial/ make-up/ tutorial classes, catch-up sessions, flexible deadlines, study support, tutoring	• “課程進度追趕得很辛苦, 學校增加了很多補課” • “學習進度完全更不上”	6
Mental health / emotional issues	Counselling, mental-health programs, non-clinical peer support, better outreach for students in need	• “Mental health” • “Emotional”	5
Attention / self-discipline (study habits)	Time-management workshops, focus strategies, structured study groups	• “self-discipline learning” • “Concentration to learning”	4
Practical/logistical (commute, environment)	Improve facilities (classroom comfort), timetable adjustments, transport/ logistics support	• “通勤很麻煩”	2
Resistance to formal support	Prefer organic/social approaches; some dislike formal counselling or feel forced	• “和社工交談讓我感到很痛苦…覺得很冷漠” • “不希望學校提供支援, 因為會變成強迫性”	3

Primary challenge	Requested support (school / social workers)	Example responses	Count
No challenge / minimal difference	No support requested	• “沒有挑戰” • “Not much of difference”	3
Others / unclear / no response	—	“/”, “NA”, blank	3
Total Response	---	---	46

Figure 9

Education and Learning Professional Support: Online Learning Resources

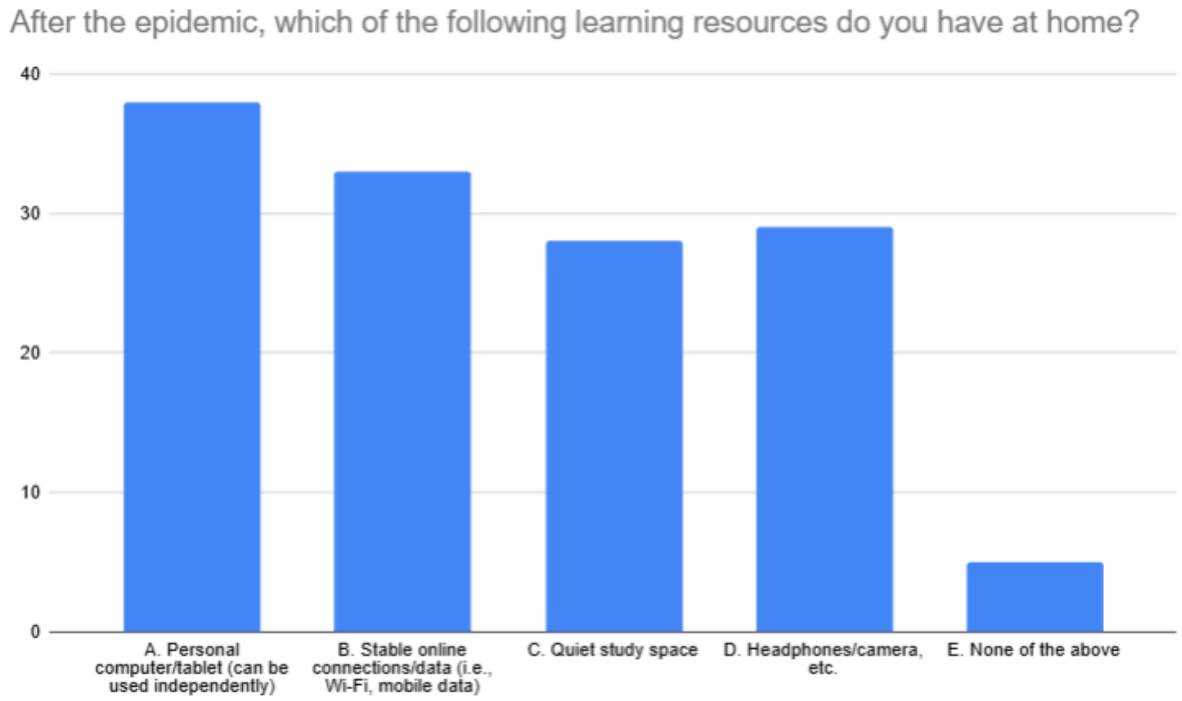


Figure 10
Other Factors Formulation

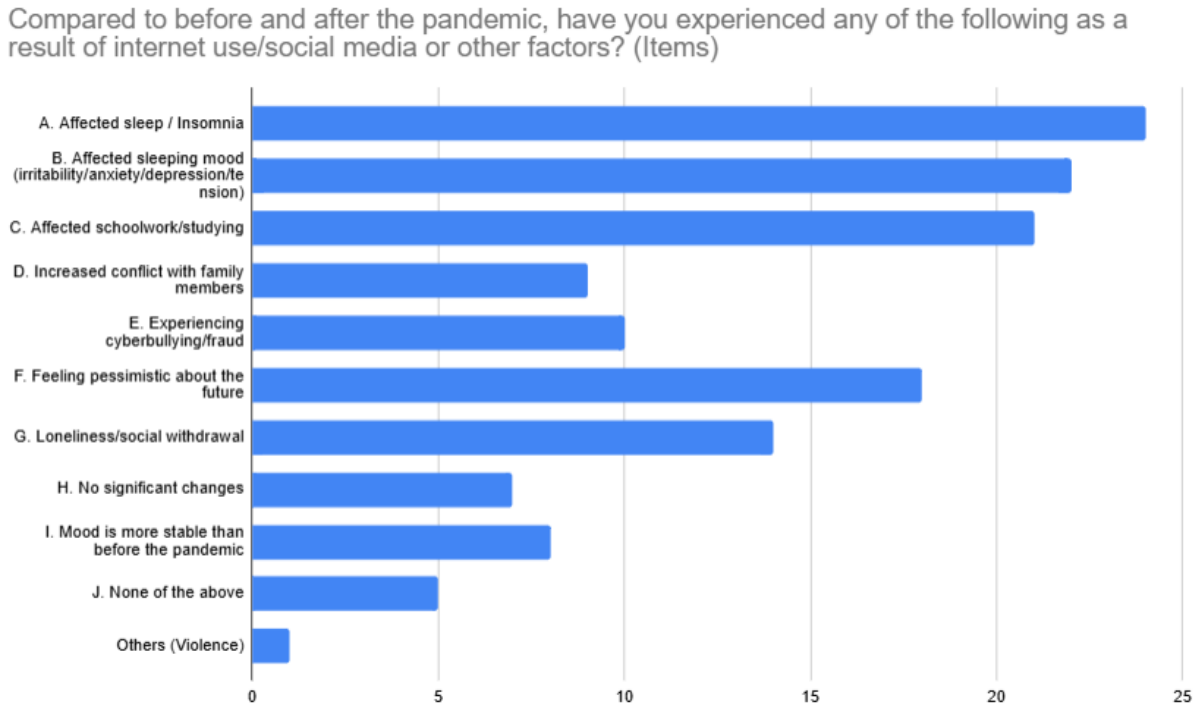
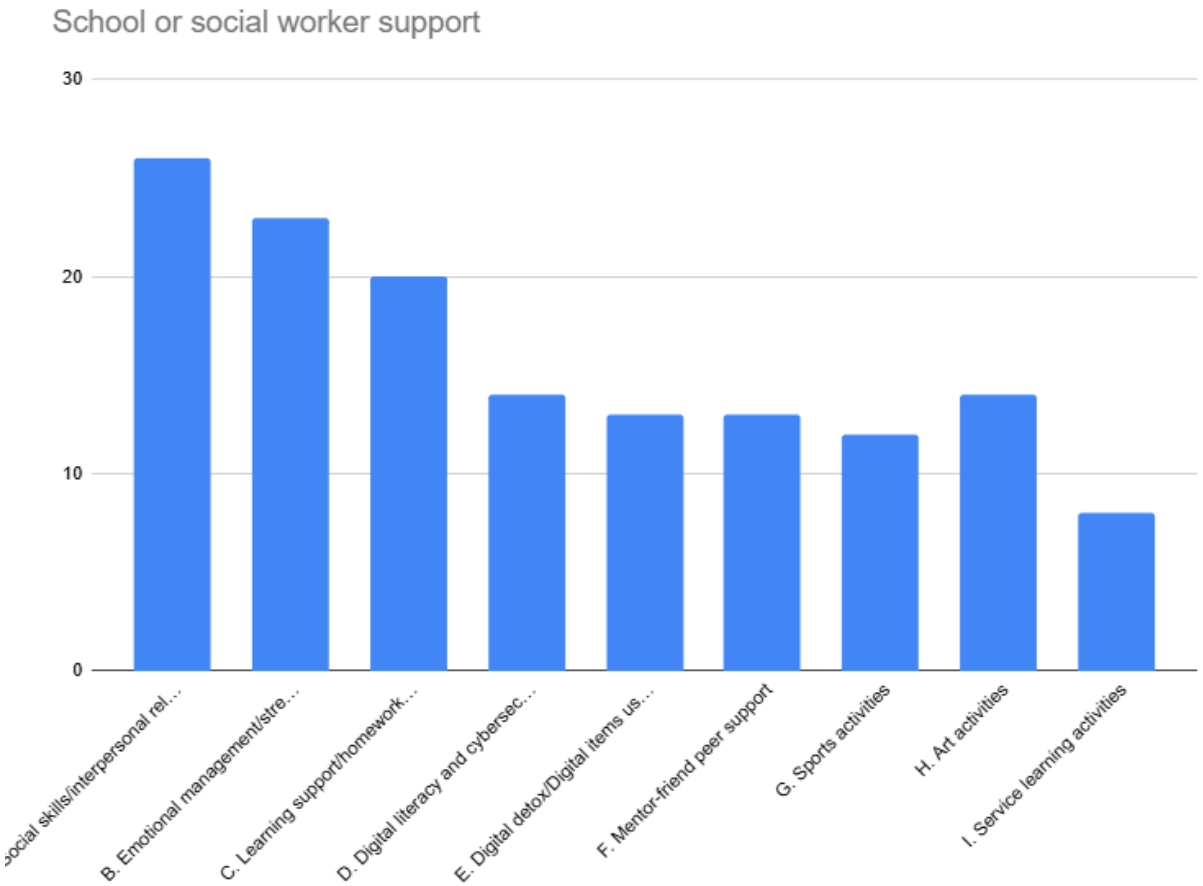


Figure 11
Educational and Social Worker Professional Support



Secondary school students also require help in improving their social skills, stress management, and anxiety reduction together with their overall psychological needs. Small group activities can be used in a face-to-face manner to restore social confidence, improve inter-personal skills and create a sense of safety and security. It is also advisable that social workers should work together with the parents to encourage authoritative rather than authoritarian parenting by listening and validating the concerns, interests, and views of the adolescents. Also, the government of HKSAR has developed the 12 Three-Tier School-Based Emergency Mechanism (with contributions from the Health Bureau, EDB, and SWD). For example, in terms of the needs regarding mental health, schools may identify students with increased suicide risk. It is recommended that the multidisciplinary team of the school should prioritize to arrange counseling to those who are considered being more likely to commit suicide and those with psychological health problems (HKSAR Government, 2023; The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2022; Yu, 2022).

Group and team work exercises (also increasing additional activities like service learning and leadership programs) to incorporate additional mental health activities (like the Education Bureau and Mental Health 4R strategy approach framework, which includes Rest, Relationship, Relaxation, and Resilience). Adolescents should identify pressure signals. Social workers can add additional individual, personalized, and tailor-made counseling leaders that help secondary school students to cope with pressure and stress through peer support; managing emotions and bearing the pressure positively; developing friendship among peers and feeling connected with peers while developing their sense of responsibility and contribution; and many others. Overall, it will help parents to provide warmth and a secure environment for their children.

Moreover, adaptation implies change; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can increase the effect on students who have to speak (Primary 6 and Secondary 6 students with DSE candidates). Simultaneously, it will also affect university students. Some learning outcomes for the groups mentioned above were discovered through the survey. Besides, more SEN issues could be explored within this paper. Secondary school students need to pay attention to their efficiency (The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2022; Palancı, 2023; Tso et al., 2023). In the future, social work should go beyond case management responsibilities and attempt to expand its perspective by combining human development theories (like investigating development trends and adaptive developments).

Resilience Development, Mental Health, and Community Service Planning Management

More specifically, neo-ecological theory mentioned that individual development is influenced by the interaction of several systems, including the family, school, peer group, and community services. In addition, an intervention would have greater chances of success if it incorporates both individual characteristics and contexts (Navarro & Tudge, 2022). Therefore, social work practice implications can be explained in (a) individual, (b) family, (c) school, and (d) community aspects. As for Children and Youth (C&Y) and social work fields, post-COVID-19 general objectives involve promoting healthy mental states, restoring social competence, and improving academic engagement. It obviously faces certain challenges. Promotion of community, psychological resilience, and adaptive coping strategies among adolescents. Resilience is seen as a developmental task supported by individual resilience and protective factors within the environment (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). For adolescents after the pandemic, their resilience can be developed through helping them regulate emotions, engage constructively with peers, and undertake activities aimed at regaining confidence when engaging socially and academically. It also raises social worker disciplines about adolescent

mental health and early interventions. The changes brought about by the pandemic led to increased anxiety, social avoidance, and difficulty in managing stress. It is essential for social workers to help schools become better prepared to identify adolescents with mental problems.

Conclusion

Summary

The influence of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is very adaptive and has implications for the social work practice. We can understand that the impacts of COVID-19 on human development are complicated. It is discovered developmental challenges faced by adolescents are often due to factors other than their personal inadequacies: the social environment and systems changes in which they operate. Adolescents experience self-exploration, peer approval, and autonomy regarding psychology. During the pandemic and end of the pandemic time, it decreased extracurricular activity participation, social withdrawal (shyness with others), and difficulty in collaboration with others. It indicates that the developmental requirements of adolescents cannot be achieved by academic work. Adolescents should have opportunities to interact with peers, have emotional regulation, and develop interpersonal communication skills. But what this paper demonstrates is the problems experienced during the post-pandemic period may not all be because of the virus itself. Indeed, those social problems are actually exacerbated versions of existing inequities like digital divides and unequal learning resources and psychosocial support at the community and school levels. It seems to me the coronavirus period becomes a catalyst for pre-existing issues within society. Although COVID-19 provides more challenges, it still provides sufficient opportunities. Indeed, the pandemic presented other opportunities as well. Through online and digital learning, young people's digital literacy sufficiently increased. Zoom, Google Meet (video conference tools), Google Classroom, Google Documents, Kahoot!, and Mentimeter become useful tools for the educator and social worker to support students' needs. Digital media cannot be a replacement for the social learning that takes place through face-to-face contact. It provides a foundation for connection and identity development, provided that young people have sufficient supervision and balance in their use of digital media (The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2020; Tse & Lau, 2023; Zarifsanaiey et al., 2024).

This research paper explored consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the psychosocial development of secondary education students in Hong Kong. In this regard, it was possible to understand the post-pandemic consequences of adolescents using developmental theories. By applying Erikson's perspective on identity development (identity role and confusion), Piaget's view on cognitive development, and Maslow's belonging and self-respect needs, it is possible to understand the effects of the pandemic on the social competence, peer affiliation, emotional resilience, and academic engagement of adolescents. The research findings provided dual consequences associated with the post-pandemic period. Firstly, it provides limitations imposed by the post-pandemic period. It made it difficult for adolescents to utilize peers in their efforts to improve their social skills and develop a sense of belongingness and identity. Or, how to reconstruct adolescents' identity and role and reshape social skills is essential. Secondly, it had consequences that had to do with the acceleration of digital/hybrid learning during the post-pandemic period. Both findings have major implications for social work practice.

Implications

Firstly, supportive interventions involve restoring protective factors at multiple ecological levels. At the individual level, adolescents require structure and social-emotional regulation supports. At the family level, clear communication and parenting advice could help establish healthy routines and avoid relational tension. Peer-building opportunities and referrals to learning and mental health services become imperative. Finally, at the community level, digital access programs and youth engagement projects help alleviate structural barriers. This article further discusses that the post-COVID era should not merely be seen as a brief "learning loss" phase. This is a time and period to enhance developmental support and service readiness among children and youth. In catering to artificial intelligence, virtual learning, digital transformation, and sustainable education learning practices, it is essential to have new "adaptations." The importance of mental, psychological, and emotional health and social interactions are pivotal.

Research Study

This paper applied different research methods, including qualitative research regarding literature reviews, scholars, Hong Kong NGO research reports, news coverage, participant interviews, and personal experiences, and quantitative research methods like surveys. This research provides a useful overview of post-COVID-19 developmental impacts and implications for social work. This paper completed the pilot study and has prepared for journal submission in the future. It is recommended to provide larger sample sizes, research effective research concepts and questionnaires, and improve research direction for the assessment of digital engagement quality and comparison of yearly research methods to track the changes in adolescent development as schooling and digital activities evolve.

Limitations

The pilot research results were the small sample size of the survey questionnaire and the small size of the qualitative data. But, specifically, professional interview and secondary school students are valuable. Also, this research study's outcomes may fail to reflect the experience of all student categories, including those with diverse SEN requirements and varying family backgrounds. It still provides references to the trend through literature review sections.

How to adaptation a "new-normal": from mental health perspectives: This research paper anticipates some recommendations regarding social work levels of engagement, involvement and perspectives. It includes restructuring of peer learning groups (to train social learning groups), experiential learning groups, social skills development groups and emotion regulation groups, digital literacy and digital detox programs, etc. The intervention can be next steps and find more data to see how changes adolescents' mental health and psychological issues. Ultimately, through the application of psychosocial and educational aspects finding in developmental theories, this paper justifies the use of a proactive and developmental social work model. Especially, adolescents adapt to the "new normal" era post-pandemic.

Acknowledgements

This research paper acknowledges the Prof. Cao Yuan, Sally (Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong), and Mr Kwan Shiu Yin, Gerald (PhD Student), for providing professional consultation and guidance. This paper

also thanks Ms Sze Lai-shan, a registered social worker (senior social management) in Hong Kong. She is vice president of the Society for Community Organization (SoCO) and conducted in-depth participant interviews and shared some insights with me about post-COVID-19 developmental impacts. Also, this paper applied the survey and collected (n = 46) different secondary school students' responses during and/or post-COVID-19 developmental impacts. Thanks to all persons or people who participated in our survey.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that this paper used Grammarly, Grammar-checking writing softwares/ functions (like EDUHK ChatGPT, Grok AI, POE, perplexity.ai, and QuillBot) to have proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical, spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-generated technologies were used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

Funding

This research study received no external or internal funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Disclaimer/Author’s Note

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Embodied Cycles: Procedural Reincarnation and Existential Narrative in Immersive VR

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

How do the circumstances of birth shape the outcomes of effort, and can such existential inequalities be felt rather than merely understood? This practice-based research presents an immersive VR experience translating philosophical reflection on life into embodied interaction. Using Meta Quest 3 hand-tracking, users traverse a boundless oceanic abyss through swimming gestures: ascent demands continuous exertion, while inaction yields gravitational descent—a procedural metaphor in which upward movement embodies perseverance and sinking represents surrender. The ten-minute experience maps onto a human lifespan, with audiovisual feedback responding to users' choices—luminous environments reward sustained effort, while desaturated darkness accompanies decline. Central to the work is a reincarnation system in which one's ending determines the next cycle's starting conditions: a triumphant conclusion initiates an “easier” life with reduced resistance, whereas a descending end produces a “harder” existence requiring greater effort for equivalent progress, rendering systemic inequality tangible.The work positions VR not merely as a visual medium but as a site where meaning emerges through bodily engagement and algorithmic consequence. By embedding existential metaphors within interaction mechanics, environmental narrative, and cyclical structure, this project examines how procedural systems can articulate philosophical propositions through felt experience, inviting users to discover personal meaning through embodied choice.

Keywords: virtual reality, embodied interaction, interactive narrative, consequential design, meaning-making

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Introduction

Within the contemporary social context, the objective conditions and subjective agency of individuals constitute the core tension of modern existence. The prevailing value system broadly presupposes that personal diligence and industrious effort serve as a reliable guarantee for transcending class boundaries and achieving one's aspirations. However, empirical reality reveals that the trajectory of individual life development is not determined solely by personal will and effort, but is profoundly constrained by the social structures and distributions of capital within which individuals are embedded. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that differential social positions and configurations of capital shape the range of possibilities available to individuals, thereby delimiting, to a considerable degree, the extent to which effort can be translated into tangible outcomes (Bourdieu, 2018). Against this backdrop, a critical question emerges: how do individuals continuously recalibrate their behavior in response to uncontrollable external constraints?

Grounded in this inquiry, the present study employs the virtual reality work *Embodied Cycles* as its primary site of practice. In contrast to the unidirectional spectatorship characteristic of conventional media, the conceptual design of this work requires participants to engage in corporeal performance and interact with the algorithmic logic embedded within the system. Through this engagement, existential propositions — including structural constraints akin to the boundaries of fate and the limits of human effort — are rendered tangible at both the physiological and perceptual levels. The bodily labor enacted in resistance to the coercive force of the system simultaneously constitutes an exercise of somatic agency, serving as an essential condition through which participants forge a substantive connection with the work itself.

Literature Review

Labor and Spatial Metaphor Under Algorithmic Mechanisms

In contemporary digital interactive environments, the underlying algorithms of a system directly determine the correspondence between user behavior and environmental feedback. The interactive mechanisms operating within virtual space are, in essence, a rule-based system constructed through programmatic parameters that strictly govern how physical bodily operations are translated into concrete changes within the digital environment (Zhou, 2026). When algorithms deeply intervene in the rules of generation, code acquires a decisive influence over spatial dynamics and the distribution of numerical values. User bodily input is no longer a straightforward hardware trigger, but rather a process of continuous submission to and adaptation within system logic. The increased physical output demanded in response to programmatic variables — such as forced descent mechanisms — is, in substantive terms, transformed into a form of embodied labor profoundly conditioned by systemic constraints. The experiential dimension generated through bodily action renders the understanding of labor in digital interaction no longer confined to purely cognitive computation, but simultaneously implicates a bidirectional mechanism of influence between the body and its environment.

As the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1945/2013) argued in his phenomenological framework, the body constitutes the fundamental medium through which the subject comprehends the world, with human perception and the construction of meaning both grounded in bodily experience. Extending this perspective, Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (2017) advanced the theory of embodied cognition, positing that cognition does not occur solely within the brain, but rather emerges from an inseparable system in which mind,

body, and environment are mutually intertwined. In other words, an individual's comprehension of and response to the digital world is fundamentally shaped by their bodily experience and perceptual structure.

Within the context of virtual reality, this perspective has been further developed into the concept of "embodied interaction," which holds that bodily movement is not merely a technical operation, but also a critical pathway through which users understand and respond to the system (Dourish, 2001). However, when an algorithm deliberately distorts the correspondence between action and feedback, profound perceptual conflict ensues. According to Cavedon-Taylor (2021), human spatial experience relies deeply upon the dynamic interrelation between bodily movement and visual experience — that is, the anticipatory structure of the sensorimotor system with respect to environmental feedback. When this naturally occurring sensorimotor expectation is deliberately disrupted or dismantled by algorithms within digital space, users are compelled to substantially increase their physical output in order to maintain their existing equilibrium. At this threshold, the system mechanism effectively strips participants of their sense of control, and the excessive labor expended in the effort to sustain one's state is, through the heightened sense of embodiment afforded by virtual reality, directly translated into intense physical and psychological experience.

As a further extension of this discussion, the embodied labor involved in resisting systemic constraints is deeply grounded in universally shared image schemata. The spatial metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1999) demonstrates that abstract human thought is fundamentally derived from spatially oriented bodily experience: "upward" universally connotes positivity, vitality, and agency, while "downward" implies negativity, loss of control, and powerlessness. When these cognitively embedded spatial metaphors are transposed into the interactive design of digital environments, the vertical axis of virtual space gradually assumes symbolic significance with respect to changes in status and degrees of control, rather than functioning as a mere physical coordinate. As the system continuously introduces downward variables through algorithmic means, the user's sense of control within the interaction becomes increasingly constrained, and the additional bodily operations required to maintain elevation are progressively transformed into a form of embodied action that perpetually responds to systemic mechanisms.

Procedural Rhetoric and Interactive Narrative

The term *procedural rhetoric* was introduced by Ian Bogost (2007) in his work *Persuasive Games*. This concept proposes that digital media are capable of expressing perspectives and constructing meaning through the operation of rules and procedures, rather than relying solely on text, imagery, or conventional narrative forms. The persuasive force of procedural rhetoric derives from the fact that participants must engage in actual practice to comprehend the perspective expressed through the system's rules; as users take action and confront the consequences of their choices during the interactive process, their understanding of the argument is grounded in first-person experience (Bogost, 2007). Within this framework, procedural mechanisms constitute a system design underpinned by algorithmic computation, shaping the conditions of action and feedback outcomes available to users within digital space through dynamically generated environmental variables and interactive rules. The distinctive capacity of digital media lies in its ability to construct discourse and convey meaning through "rules" and "computational processes," rather than relying solely on visual representation or textual narrative — a development that resonates with the ontological turn in contemporary

visual rhetoric, wherein the core of digital imagery has shifted from traditional symbolic form to the underlying data structures and software logic that drive it (Chiu, 2014).

Furthermore, the critical potential of procedural rhetoric is not merely manifest in the empowerment of participants, but is more frequently expressed through the "restriction of agency" or the "construction of futile behavioral loops," as metaphors for the irresistible structural oppression encountered in the real world. When a system is deliberately designed around a computational logic that renders effort and reward fundamentally asymmetrical, the sense of futility itself becomes a powerfully persuasive procedural argument. When computational rules serve as the medium of meaning-making, interactive narrative accordingly constitutes the experiential domain in which procedural rhetoric finds its practical realization.

Janet H. Murray (2017), in *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, identifies new possibilities that digital media bring to narrative form. Three concepts — "agency," "immersion," and "transformation" — are regarded as the key aesthetic dimensions constituting interactive narrative experience. "Agency" confers upon users the capacity to take meaningful action and to personally experience its consequences; "immersion" constructs a sensory and psychological sense of presence; and "transformation" implies that users are capable of achieving cognitive transformation and the reconstruction of meaning through the course of interaction. Accordingly, when highly constraining procedural mechanisms intervene in the interactive structure, what was originally conceived as an empowering interactive experience may undergo a fundamental shift: "agency" is compressed under the influence of algorithmic logic, confining users' actions to operations aimed at sustaining system states; "immersion" is likewise transformed from sensory engagement into an experience that amplifies anxiety and the sense of losing control; and "transformation" no longer points straightforwardly toward the active exploration of meaning, but becomes a process of continuous adjustment and adaptation within the parameters imposed by system rules.

Within digital interactive environments, the exercise of power frequently does not manifest in the form of explicit prohibitions or commands, but is instead embedded within the rules of system architecture and algorithmic operation (Galloway, 2004). Alexander Galloway (2004) argues that control within digital networks is achieved not through coercive directives, but through protocol — that is, through the ensemble of rules governing system operation — allowing power to permeate digital space in a form that is decentralized yet ubiquitous. Once system mechanisms are configured as irreversible procedural variables, the algorithm comes to govern the operation of rules within that interactive environment. Under such conditions, the actions and choices available to users must be carried out within the predetermined parameters of the system, and their agency is correspondingly curtailed. Consequently, when the environmental laws of virtual reality are no longer a static backdrop, but continuously evolve in accordance with temporal progression and interactive data, the procedural operation of the system assumes an increasingly dominant role within digital space. In other words, within highly autonomous procedural mechanisms, algorithms not only influence environmental change, but also determine to a considerable extent the physical rules and distribution of numerical values within virtual space, thereby constituting a structurally asymmetrical relationship between users and the system.

Methodology

Creative Concept

The present study takes the virtual reality work *Embodied Cycles* as its site of creative practice. The conceptual foundation of this work originates from a critical observation of the existential conditions characterizing contemporary society. The work employs the oceanic abyss as a central metaphor, symbolizing the invisible yet persistently operative forces of structural power. Participants are situated within an unbounded vertical virtual space, in which they must continuously perform upward and downward swimming gestures with their arms in order to maintain their altitude. Concurrently, the system's algorithmic mechanism imposes a compulsory descent logic, compelling participants to perpetually resist the system's procedural pressure through sustained physical output. Through this design, sociological observations and critique are concretely translated into an immersive virtual reality experience.

Grounded in the aforementioned creative concept, this study adopts a practice-based research methodology. Specifically, the design intent of this work is to critically reflect upon and deconstruct the singular narrative that treats “effort as an inevitable guarantor of success.” To this end, the system establishes three difficulty modes — Easy, Normal, and Hard — each configured with distinct physical parameters to simulate the differential impact that varying conditions of action may exert upon outcomes. In the Easy mode, users require relatively few arm movements to ascend, and the rate of environmental descent is comparatively slow. In the Hard mode, by contrast, even substantial increases in physical output yield only marginal upward movement, while the rate of descent is markedly accelerated. Through this tripartite parametric differentiation, the work transforms the inequity of action conditions into a perceptible interactive mechanism, responding to Bogost's conception of procedural rhetoric. In doing so, it enables participants to experientially apprehend the structural disparities embedded within the system's rules through first-person embodied labor — through the actual process of operation and its resultant feedback — rather than arriving at such understanding through purely conceptual cognition.

System Architecture and Procedural Rhetoric Design

This study employs Unity as its development engine. The design of the system architecture is not oriented primarily toward achieving visual realism, but rather toward the construction of interactive rules and computational mechanisms as the means of realizing the concept of procedural rhetoric as proposed by Ian Bogost (2007).

At the level of spatial construction, the work employs an unbounded deep-sea vertical environment as its primary spatial domain. Horizontal spatial references are deliberately eliminated, rendering the vertical axis the sole directional dimension perceptible to participants, thereby intensifying the symbolic tension between “upward” and “downward.” In terms of algorithmic design, the system embeds an invisible yet continuously operative “downward sinking force,” constituting an incessant structural pressure. Should participants cease physical output, they will begin to descend steadily after only a few seconds of inactivity, compelling them to maintain uninterrupted bodily labor in order to resist the system's logic. Within the framework of procedural rhetoric, the physical simulation of forced descent operates as a form of what Galloway (2004) designates as “algorithmic power,” metaphorically evoking the inescapable pressure of class descent embedded within social structures. By exerting influence over environmental states through continuously computed rule mechanisms, the system

requires participants to engage in persistent bodily operations to sustain their position — a condition that corresponds to the social structural situation in which individuals must continually invest effort simply to maintain their existing circumstances.

In order to engage critically with the reality of a profound asymmetry between effort and reward, and to challenge the myth that individual effort can readily overcome class constraints, the system establishes three distinct physical parameter configurations — Easy, Normal, and Hard. Each mode adjusts the parametric relationship between "labor conversion rate (upward thrust)" and "structural gravity (sinking force)," such that participants encounter differentiated conditions of interaction throughout the experience:

1. **Easy Mode:** The system assigns a higher upward thrust multiplier and reduces the baseline sinking force. Participants readily experience a sense of efficacy akin to "reaping what one sows," metaphorically representing a state of advantageous social capital.
2. **Normal Mode:** Thrust and sinking force are held in a state of tension, requiring participants to maintain a consistent frequency of physical output in order to resist the system's default tendency to pull them toward the abyss — reflecting the normative condition of labor for the majority of individuals within social structures.
3. **Hard Mode:** The system substantially diminishes the upward thrust generated by arm movement and raises the sinking force to its maximum level. Under these conditions, even considerable physical exertion yields only negligible upward movement, and participants may be unable to arrest their descent altogether.

Table 1
Specific Parameter Configurations and Metaphorical Correspondences Across Difficulty Modes

Parameter	Easy Mode	Normal Mode	Hard Mode
Gravitational Intensity	Low	Medium	High
Ascent Efficiency	High	Medium	Low
Descent Speed	Slow	Moderate	Fast
Metaphorical Meaning	Privileged family background	Middle-class family background	Disadvantaged family background

Source: Author

The differential conditions of action corresponding to the three parameter configurations respond to Bourdieu's (2018) observation regarding the structural influence of capital accumulation conditions upon the possibilities available to individuals: an individual's social position does not constitute a neutral point of departure, but rather fundamentally determines the scope and ceiling within which effort may be converted into outcomes.

Beyond the spatial and physical dimensions of systemic pressure, the work further aligns the temporal structure of the experience with the arc of the human life course. The total interactive experience is set at approximately ten minutes, with this duration symbolically representing the complete life cycle from birth to old age. The system employs linear temporal progression as its foundational structure, divided into five principal stages: Birth (the initial stage), Childhood, Youth, Middle Age, and Old Age, each lasting approximately two minutes. The system differentiates the visual vocabulary and atmospheric qualities of the environment

according to the participant's current life stage and their present state (ascending or descending), thereby generating a staged perceptual and narrative rhythm. The design of the work's conclusion employs a reincarnation-based evaluation mechanism and initialization for the subsequent life cycle. Rather than measuring effort solely by operational frequency (such as the number of arm strokes), the system calculates an achievement value based on the final altitude maintained by the participant within the vertical space at the conclusion of their experience, which in turn influences the initial difficulty setting of the subsequent cycle.

Interactive Mechanisms and Embodied Experience Design

This work employs hand-tracking technology as its input interface, eliminating the need for participants to hold controllers and allowing their hands to function directly as the bodily medium through which they interact with the system. Participants drive vertical movement within the virtual space by simulating upward and downward swimming strokes, establishing a direct perceptual correspondence between bodily movement and spatial position. The system captures in real time the dynamic frequency and spatial amplitude of participants' arm movements, converting these inputs into upward thrust parameters such that the physical expenditure of bodily effort corresponds directly to displacement within virtual space — constituting the core embodied labor mechanism of the work. This interactive mechanism, which demands continuous physical output, deliberately produces a persistent discrepancy between sensorimotor expectation and system feedback. This constitutes a concrete design-level realization of the perceptual conflict mechanism described by Cavedon-Taylor (2021): the fatigue and loss of control experienced by participants at the physiological level are directly translated, through the heightened embodiment afforded by virtual reality, into a bodily cognition of structural oppression. Within this framework, the “immersion” discussed by Murray (2017) is inverted from its conventional association with sensory engagement and pleasure into an experiential domain that amplifies anxiety and the sense of futility.

Furthermore, in order to simulate the uncontrollable variables inherent in social mobility, the experiential environment of the work incorporates dynamic fluid resistance — that is, sudden structural interference — signifying that the conversion rate of physical output is not constant, but is subject to intervention by the system's state. This further intensifies participants' sense of helplessness in their confrontation with algorithmic power, enabling them, through the perpetual repetition of procedural labor, to deeply apprehend the inescapability of structural oppression as an enduring condition of existence.

Discussion and Future Directions

The present work has, to date, completed foundational immersive scene construction within the Unity engine, including the establishment of a visual language for the deep-sea vertical space and the preliminary integration of the hand-tracking input interface. The algorithmic parameter design of the forced descent mechanism and the numerical configurations of the three difficulty modes remain in a process of continuous iterative development. In accordance with the methodology of practice-based research, adjustments are made throughout the development process through iterative testing and feedback, so as to maintain alignment between the technical implementation and the conceptual propositions that the procedural rhetoric seeks to convey. At the current stage, analysis is conducted primarily on the basis of reflective interpretation generated during the creative process; systematic user experience data have not yet been incorporated, and this constitutes a central dimension to be addressed in subsequent research.

On the whole, the present study has established the core interactive mechanisms, system architecture, and procedural rhetoric logic of the work. Upon the completion of the interactive prototype, this research will adopt a phenomenologically oriented qualitative evaluation methodology, employing semi-structured interviews to gather first-person experiential accounts from participants, with the aim of investigating their embodied perceptual experiences within the virtual reality interaction. The evaluation will concentrate on two principal dimensions of embodied perception. The first concerns whether, across the three difficulty modes, the physical fatigue generated by embodied labor is effectively translated into psychological resonance with structural oppression, thereby producing an experiential understanding of systemic coercion — and in so doing, to verify the practical efficacy of Cavedon-Taylor's (2021) perceptual conflict mechanism at the level of design. The second concerns the narrative internalization of spatial metaphor: specifically, whether participants are able, in the absence of any textual narration, to comprehend the existential conditions and hierarchical implications embedded within the work solely through the sustained spatial displacement of ascent and descent, experienced from a first-person immersive perspective — thereby examining the potential applicability of Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) spatial metaphor theory within the context of immersive interactive design.

Conclusion

The present study employs the virtual reality work Embodied Cycles: Procedural Rhetoric and Survival Narrative in Immersive VR as its primary site of practice, integrating Bourdieu's (2018) theory of social structure, Bogost's (2007) framework of procedural rhetoric, and the perspective of embodied cognition to propose a design approach capable of communicating social issues through interactive mechanisms. In doing so, the study seeks to deconstruct the singular narrative that treats effort as an inevitable guarantor of success, and to illuminate the structural constraints that operate beneath the surface of individual action.

At the level of design, the analytical findings of this study demonstrate that through the implementation of a forced descent mechanism and a differentiated physical parameter configuration, algorithmic rules themselves may serve as a discursive medium for critiquing structural inequality within society, enabling participants to perceive, through the course of their interaction, the asymmetrical relationship between effort and reward. The spatial dynamics of ascent and descent within the vertical environment function as a spatialized metaphor for social mobility and class positioning, offering a design methodology through which abstract social structures may be translated into embodied experience. The immersive experience is likewise deliberately constructed as an unstable and constrained interactive situation, inverting what Murray (2017) conceives of as “immersion” into an amplificatory domain of anxiety and futility.

At the theoretical level, the present study responds to and extends the applicability of Bogost's (2007) concept of procedural rhetoric within immersive interactive environments, arguing that the generation of meaning may emerge from the dynamic relationship between bodily action and system rules. The study further affirms the practical viability of embodied cognition theory and spatial metaphor theory within the context of virtual reality interactive design. As an ongoing practice-based research project, future work will employ phenomenological evaluation to further verify the efficacy of the proposed design framework, and to explore both the potential and the limitations of immersive interactive media as an instrument of social critique.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that Claude, an AI assistant developed by Anthropic, was used in the writing process to assist with language refinement, structural organization, and translation between Chinese and English. The core creative concepts, design decisions, interaction mechanisms, and research directions are originally conceived by the authors. The AI assistance was limited to improving clarity, coherence, and academic expression of the manuscript.

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Balancing Structural Bonding and Surface Aesthetics: A Case Study on the Platinum Print *Porcelain Nude 2017(10)*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In the *Porcelain Nude* series, Japanese artist Yasumichi Morita elevates human curves into a pure, porcelain-like texture through the platinotype process. Because the image particles are embedded deep within acid-free cotton fibers, the works possess a profound matte quality and a rich, warm tonal range with velvet-like shadow expressions. This article explores the restoration of *Porcelain Nude Platinum 2017(10)*, which sustained mechanical tears and scratches on the recto. The treatment involved mending, structural consolidation, and inpainting of the damaged areas, aiming to restore both the structural integrity of the paper substrate and the print's unique surface characteristics. Nevertheless, the artist's aesthetic pursuit defines the technical challenges in conservation. The primary challenge of this case lies in the damage's location at the image core—a monochromatic dark area where any flaw is visually prominent. Since adhesives can easily alter the distinct physical surface properties of platinum prints, it was necessary to balance structural bonding with precise adhesive control. Therefore, two technical adaptations were implemented to mitigate these constraints. First, the interlacing fibers were microscopically realigned and flattened using sandbags to restore the substrate's planar integrity. Next, isinglass—selected for its small molecular size and high permeability—was applied in two stages. This "adhesive-to-adhesive" approach ensures structural stability for the substrate while minimizing aesthetic interference. This case serves as a valuable reference for the future conservation of platinum prints. Through this meticulous restoration, we hope to preserve the artist's eternal pursuit of aesthetic perfection.

Keywords: conservation, mending, sturgeon glue, platinum print

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Introduction

Aesthetic Craftsmanship and Structure

Through the platinotype process, Japanese artist Yasumichi Morita elevates human curves into a pure, porcelain-like texture. Lacking a binder or baryta layer, the image particles are embedded deep within acid-free cotton fibers. As a result, the works possess a profound matte quality and a rich, warm tonal range with velvet-like shadow expressions. This unique physical structure defines the artwork's ethereal aesthetic but also dictates its extreme vulnerability.

The Conservation Challenge

This case study addresses the restoration of *Porcelain Nude Platinum 2017(10)*, which sustained mechanical tears and scratches within the image core—a monochromatic dark area where any flaw is visually prominent. Because the uncoated surface is exceptionally sensitive to moisture and adhesives, direct application risks inducing tide lines or a residual gloss interface. Such undesirable effects would severely compromise the aesthetic integrity of the artist's "porcelain" vision and the essential visual continuity of the dark tonal regions.

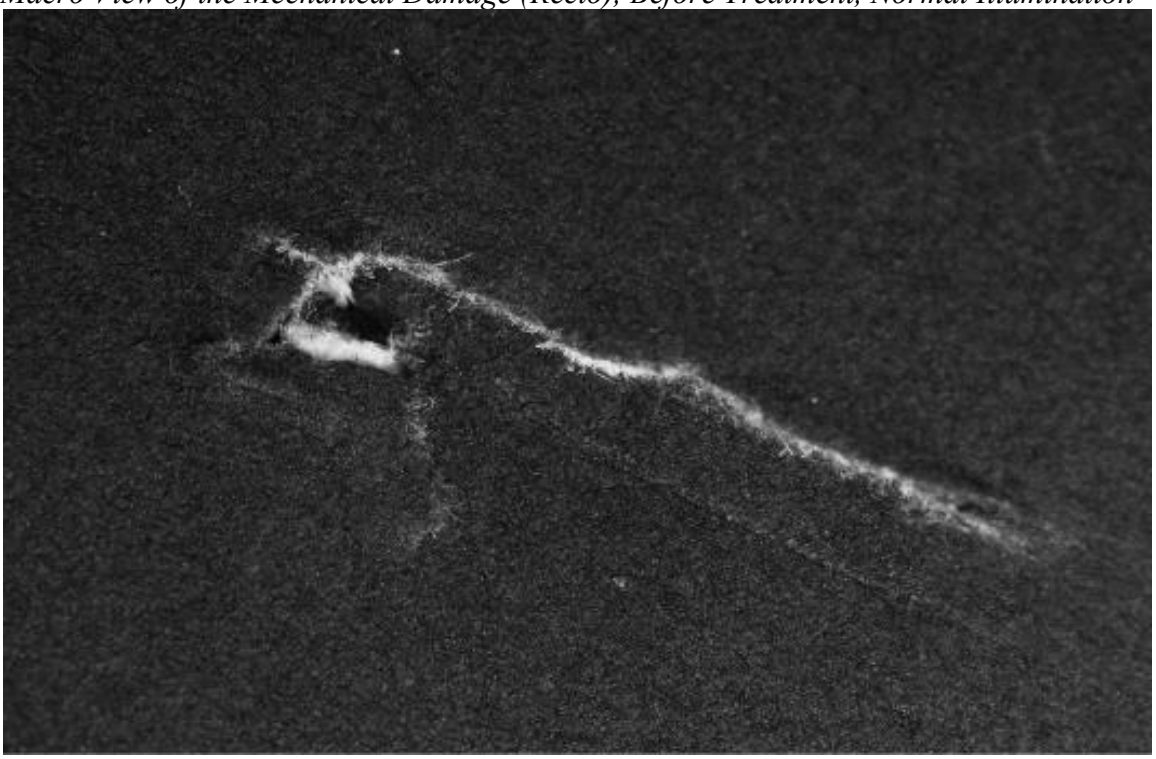
Figure 1
Overall View of the Artwork (50.8 × 60.8 cm), Before Treatment, Normal Illumination



Note. The mechanical damage is approximately 2 cm in length.

Figure 2

Macro View of the Mechanical Damage (Recto), Before Treatment, Normal Illumination



Note. A distinct 7-shaped tear, characterized by severed and displaced fibres.

Figure 3

Macro View of the Mechanical Damage (Recto), Before Treatment, Strong Direct Illumination



Note. Disrupted matte surface texture visible; yellow arrow marks scratches.

Figure 4

Macro View of the Mechanical Damage (Verso), Before Treatment, Illuminated From the Top



Note. Protruding fibers show penetration.

Materials & Evaluation

To ensure compatibility with the platinum print, a range of adhesives—including Wheat Starch Paste (WSP), Gelatin, Methylcellulose (MC), Klucel G, and Sturgeon glue—were systematically screened. Following concentration and performance testing, 1.0%–1.5% Sturgeon glue was selected based on the following advantages:

1. Structural Integrity and Physical Stability: As a high-purity collagen, sturgeon glue provides sufficient tensile strength even at low concentrations, ensuring robust structural mending.
2. Superior Optical Properties and Color Retention: With its exceptional clarity upon drying, it preserves the original depth of dark tones. Unlike Klucel G, it poses no risk of yellowing, and it avoids the formation of microscopic crystalline highlights (sparkles) often associated with Methylcellulose.
3. High Penetrability and Texture Preservation: Its low molecular weight and excellent flow characteristics allow for deep fiber penetration without surface accumulation. Compared to gelatin, it more effectively maintains the characteristic low-reflectance of the matte surface.
4. Flexibility and Low Shrinkage Stress: The resulting adhesive film is highly elastic. Compared to Wheat Starch Paste, it significantly mitigates shrinkage stress during drying, minimizing secondary physical damage to the fragile fibers.
5. Conservation Ethics: Its outstanding water solubility and chemical reversibility strictly adhere to international conservation standards.

Evaluation Result

At low concentrations, sturgeon glue achieves the ideal balance between structural reinforcement and aesthetic presentation, making it the definitive choice for this treatment.

Conservation Treatments

1. Fiber Realignment (Figure 5): Using a stereo microscope, the displaced and fractured paper fibers are precisely realigned.
2. Pressure (Figure 6): Localized pressure was then applied using sandbags to restore the planarity of the fiber. This step ensures that the internal structure of the tear is perfectly matched before any adhesive is applied.
3. Mending:
4. Since adhesives can easily alter the distinct physical surface properties of platinum prints, it was necessary to balance structural bonding with precise adhesive control. Therefore, two tailored methodological adjustments were implemented to mitigate these constraints.
    (1) Pre-stabilization (Figure 7): A highly diluted solution of sturgeon glue (1.0%) is pre-applied to the exposed fiber ends. This "pre-coating" penetrates the porous fiber structure, stabilizing the damaged area and creating a receptive base for the subsequent bond without altering the surface gloss.
    (2) Structural Rejoining (Figure 8 and 9): A 1.5% sturgeon glue was applied to establish an "adhesive-to-adhesive" bond. The tear was rejoined from the verso while verifying fiber alignment from the recto, followed by the application of Tengujo tissue on the verso for structural reinforcement.
5. Inpainting (Figure 10): Losses in the image were meticulously toned. The repair was then rigorously inspected under various light sources to ensure visual continuity.

Figure 5

Precise Repositioning Under Magnification

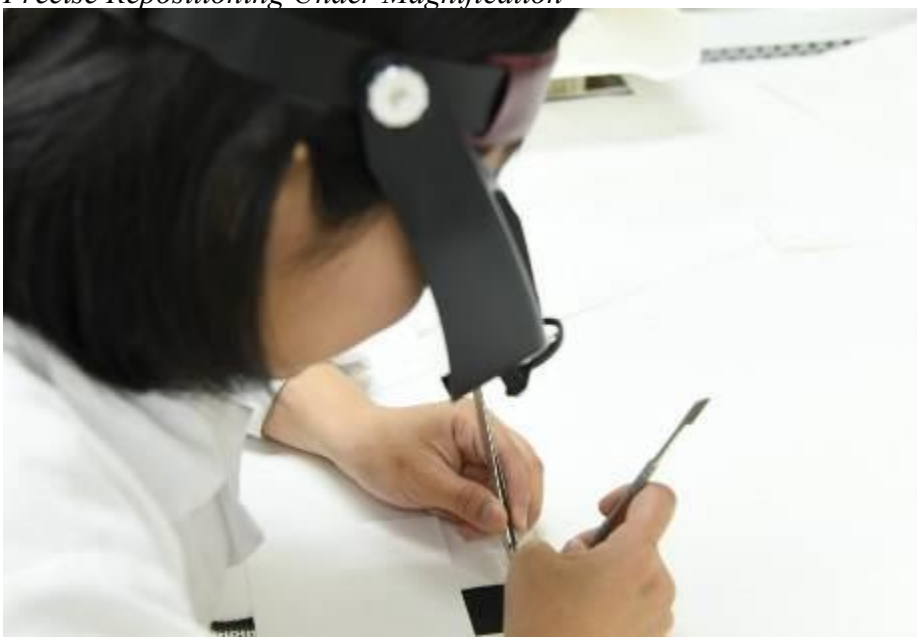


Figure 6
Locally Weighted With Sandbags



Figure 7
Pre-stabilization



Figure 8
A 1.5% Sturgeon Glue Was Applied to Establish an "Adhesive-to-Adhesive" Bond

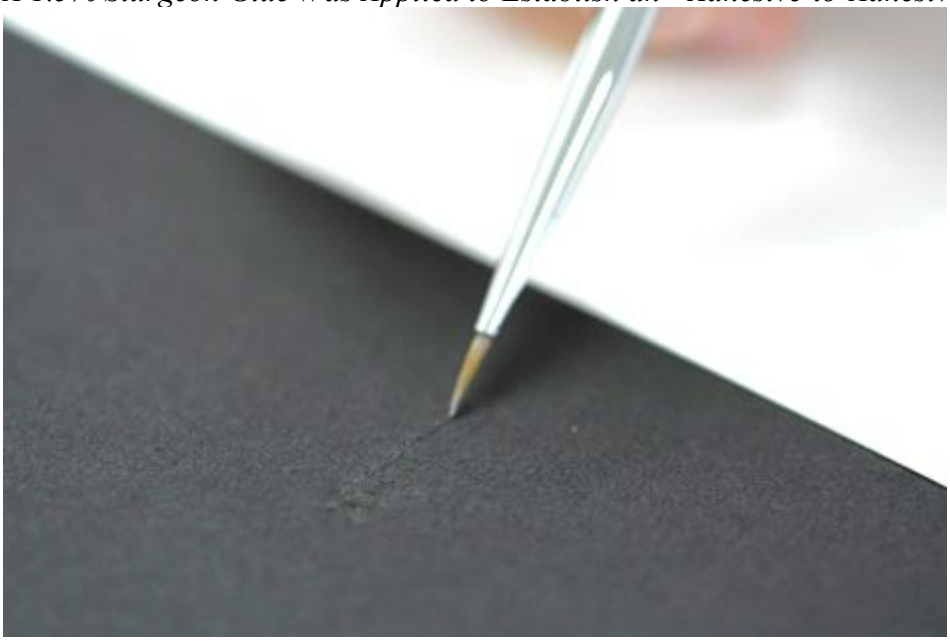


Figure 9
The Application of Tengujo Tissue on the Verso



Figure 10
Inpainting



Results and Discussion

Physically restoring the planarity of the paper support during the initial Fiber Realignment phase proved critical, as it minimized the need to introduce moisture during subsequent wet treatments.

The applied sturgeon glue effectively prevented crystalline sparkles often caused by high-molecular-weight residues, rendering the mending site invisible. The treatment successfully secured the tear, achieving structural stability without the adverse effects of adhesive-induced tension on the fragile fibers.

Complementing the material choice, the two-stage mending strategy minimized moisture introduction, effectively precluding the formation of tide lines and residual gloss. This approach successfully safeguarded the work's profound matte quality and velvet-like shadow expressions.

Figure 11
Macro View of the Mechanical Damage (Recto), After Treatment, Normal Illumination

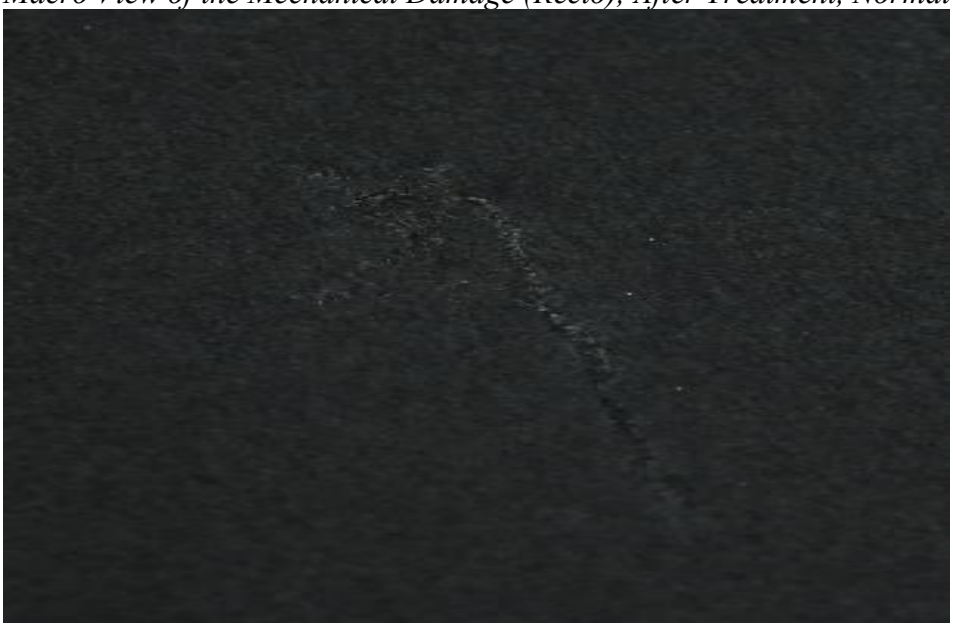


Figure 12
Macro View of the Mechanical Damage (Recto), After Treatment, Strong Direct Illumination



Figure 13
Macro View of the Mechanical Damage (Verso), After Treatment, Illuminated From the Top



Conclusion

This study presents a precise conservation treatment for Japanese artist Yasumichi Morita's platinum print, *Porcelain Nude Platinum 2017(10)*, from the *Porcelain Nude* series. Facing mechanical tears and scratches located at the image core—a monochromatic dark area—the conservation team encountered a major challenge: executing structural bonding while safeguarding the print's unique deep matte quality and velvet-like shadow expressions. To address this, a tailored two-stage sturgeon glue (isinglass) strategy was implemented. First, the displaced paper fibers were microscopically realigned and flattened under localized sandbag pressure to restore planar integrity. Next, highly diluted solutions of 1.0% and 1.5% sturgeon glue were sequentially applied to establish a robust "adhesive-to-adhesive" bond. Owing to the adhesive's high permeability, low shrinkage stress, and excellent chemical reversibility, this approach minimized moisture introduction, effectively precluding the formation of secondary tide lines or residual surface gloss. The treatment successfully achieved an invisible yet structurally secure repair, fully preserving the artist's aesthetic vision of light, shadow, and serene "porcelain-like" human curves. Ultimately, this case study balances physical stability with surface aesthetics, offering an invaluable evidence-based conservation model for the future preservation of moisture-sensitive, uncoated contemporary photographic masterpieces and delicate modern prints worldwide.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to ALIEN Art Centre. This research was funded by the Conservation and Research Center of Cheng Shiu University (CSU) through the Higher Education Sprout Project (Featured Areas Research Center Program), Ministry of Education (MOE), Taiwan.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Gemini in order to translate the original manuscript into English. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

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Rising Above the Waters: Narrative Inquiry Into the Rewriting of Family Legacies by Filipino Adults Triumphant Over Intergenerational Poverty

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study examines how Filipino adults have disrupted intergenerational poverty through their lived experiences using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach. Ten adults, aged 36–50, were purposively selected from urban and rural communities across the Philippines, representing diverse socioeconomic backgrounds from subsistence households to middle-class families. Participants were selected specifically for having achieved upward mobility despite intergenerational economic hardship. In-depth, semi-structured interviews explored how participants interpreted and navigated poverty across time, relationships, and places, shifting focus from economic metrics to relational and experiential dimensions. Anchored in Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework, findings are organized into four resonant threads, resilience, altruism, faith and formation, and tenacity, revealing recurring patterns across participants' life stories. One participant, for example, described working multiple informal jobs to support siblings' education while simultaneously caring for younger relatives, demonstrating resilience and altruism intertwined with faith and formation. Bowen Family Systems Theory was applied analytically to examine how family emotional processes, differentiation of self, and relational dynamics shaped their capacity for upward mobility. The findings highlight the relational and meaning-making aspects of poverty disruption and underscore the importance of culturally grounded, family-sensitive approaches. This study contributes to literature on poverty, family studies, and mental health by offering contextually rich insights relevant to counseling, education, and community-based interventions in the Philippine context. By centering participants' narratives, the study illustrates how intergenerational legacies can be rewritten through perseverance, relational support, and intentional, informed life choices.

Keywords: intergenerational poverty, narrative inquiry, Filipino adults, family systems theory, resilience, social mobility

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Introduction

Intergenerational poverty remains a persistent global challenge, characterized by the transmission of economic hardship, limited educational opportunities, unstable employment, and restricted social mobility across multiple generations within families. In the Philippines, despite recent improvements in national poverty statistics, millions of Filipinos continue to experience chronic poverty shaped by structural inequalities, limited access to quality education, precarious labor conditions, and socioeconomic instability. The Philippine Statistics Authority reported a decline in poverty incidence from 18.1% in 2021 to 15.5% in 2023, equivalent to approximately 2.45 million fewer Filipinos living below the poverty threshold (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA], 2024). Nevertheless, many Filipino families remain vulnerable to recurring cycles of deprivation that extend across generations.

Existing literature on poverty has largely focused on identifying its causes and proposing interventions aimed at alleviation. Studies have examined the cultural, societal, familial, and psychological dimensions that sustain intergenerational poverty, including limited educational access, unstable employment, systemic inequality, adverse family dynamics, and weakened social support systems. While these studies contribute significantly to understanding poverty persistence, considerably less attention has been given to individuals who successfully disrupted these intergenerational patterns and achieved upward mobility despite enduring structural and relational disadvantages.

In the Philippine context, narratives of individuals who have "*naka-ahon sa kahirapan*" or risen above poverty are commonly celebrated in public discourse. However, these stories are often anecdotal and remain insufficiently documented within scholarly research. There is limited qualitative literature examining the lived experiences of Filipino adults who have successfully overcome intergenerational poverty and the relational, cultural, and personal processes that contributed to their transformation. This gap limits the development of culturally grounded and family-sensitive interventions that can better support vulnerable Filipino families navigating chronic economic hardship.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived narratives of ten Filipino adults who successfully overcame intergenerational poverty. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach grounded in the three-dimensional framework of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the study examines how participants interpreted and navigated poverty across time, relationships, and place. Particular attention is given to the influence of cultural, societal, familial, and personal factors that shaped their pathways toward upward mobility.

The study is further anchored in Bowen Family Systems Theory, particularly the concept of differentiation of self, which emphasizes how individuals develop emotional autonomy while remaining connected within family systems. Through this lens, the study examines how family emotional processes, relational patterns, and multigenerational dynamics influenced participants' capacity to transcend inherited economic adversity.

By centering the voices and narratives of Filipino adults who successfully disrupted intergenerational poverty, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on poverty, family systems, resilience, and social mobility. More importantly, it offers contextually grounded insights that may inform counseling practice, family-centered interventions, educational initiatives, and policy development aimed at supporting Filipino families experiencing chronic poverty.

Literature Review

Intergenerational Poverty

Intergenerational poverty refers to the persistent transmission of economic hardship, limited opportunities, and social disadvantage across multiple generations within families. Existing literature demonstrates that poverty is not solely an economic condition but also a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by cultural, societal, familial, and psychological factors. Studies have identified limited access to education, unstable employment, systemic inequality, and restricted social mobility as significant contributors to the continuation of poverty across generations (Bavaro et al., 2024; Rutkowski et al., 2016; Visser et al., 2021).

Research further suggests that poverty is reinforced through family dynamics, environmental stressors, and internalized beliefs that influence individuals' perceptions of opportunity and self-worth (Böhnke & Zölch, 2018; Fu et al., 2020; Tribble & Kim, 2019). Structural barriers such as inadequate labor opportunities, geographic disadvantage, and unequal access to resources continue to constrain upward mobility for many families experiencing chronic deprivation (MacDonald et al., 2020; Rutkowski et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2019). In the Philippine context, studies on poverty have predominantly focused on economic interventions and welfare programs, with limited attention given to the lived experiences of individuals who successfully disrupted intergenerational poverty patterns (Lluz, 2020).

Pathways Out of Poverty

Although poverty often persists across generations, literature also highlights several pathways that enable individuals and families to achieve upward mobility. Education consistently emerges as one of the most significant transformative factors in disrupting poverty cycles. Research demonstrates that educational attainment improves employment opportunities, enhances earning potential, and strengthens long-term social mobility (Jackson, 2024; Pohan & Vitale, 2016; Vân, 2018). Beyond formal education, studies also emphasize the importance of mentorship, entrepreneurship, livelihood opportunities, and supportive social welfare programs in helping vulnerable populations overcome chronic poverty (Cudia, 2019; Hemingway, 2023; Hirai & Hiyane, 2021; Morris et al., 2020).

In addition to structural support, resilience and personal agency play vital roles in poverty disruption. Individuals who successfully transcend poverty often demonstrate perseverance, adaptability, long-term goal orientation, and the capacity to navigate adversity despite significant limitations. Community support, faith, family encouragement, and access to meaningful relationships further strengthen individuals' capacity to pursue opportunities for upward mobility (Jacinto, 2023; Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2015).

Family Systems and Relational Dynamics

Family Systems Theory provides an important framework for understanding how relational processes shape human development and behavior. Bowen Family Systems Theory conceptualizes the family as an emotional and interconnected system in which the experiences and behaviors of one member influence the functioning of the entire family unit (Bowen, 1978). One of the central concepts within the theory is differentiation of self, which refers to an individual's ability to maintain emotional autonomy while remaining meaningfully connected to the family system (Calatrava et al., 2021).

Research grounded in family systems perspectives suggests that multigenerational emotional patterns, family expectations, parenting dynamics, and relational stress significantly influence how individuals respond to adversity and life challenges (Böhnke & Zölch, 2018; Palombi, 2016). Families experiencing chronic poverty often encounter heightened emotional stress, instability, and role strain, which may reinforce cycles of disadvantage across generations (Tribble & Kim, 2019). At the same time, supportive family relationships and adaptive emotional functioning can foster resilience and facilitate upward mobility (Stack et al., 2015; Upadhyaya et al., 2021).

Resilience and Social Mobility

Resilience is frequently identified in literature as a critical factor in overcoming adversity and achieving social mobility. Rather than viewing resilience as a fixed individual trait, contemporary studies describe it as a dynamic process shaped by personal determination, relational support, environmental opportunities, and cultural context (Jacinto, 2023; Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2015). Individuals who overcome poverty often draw strength from supportive relationships, meaningful life goals, spirituality, and opportunities for growth despite enduring structural hardship (Fu et al., 2020; Hemingway, 2023).

Within the Philippine context, resilience is deeply intertwined with collectivist cultural values such as family solidarity, relational responsibility, and communal support. Filipino families frequently rely on shared sacrifice, emotional interconnectedness, and faith-based coping during periods of hardship. These cultural dynamics influence how individuals interpret adversity and construct pathways toward upward mobility (Cabaguing & Villanueva, 2022; Jacinto, 2023). Understanding these lived experiences is essential in developing culturally grounded interventions that move beyond purely economic understandings of poverty and recognize the relational and meaning-making dimensions of social mobility.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design to explore the lived experiences of Filipino adults who successfully overcame intergenerational poverty. Narrative inquiry focuses on understanding how individuals construct meaning from their experiences across time, relationships, and social contexts. Anchored in the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the study examined participants' experiences through the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place.

A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to select ten Filipino adults aged 36 to 50 who had experienced intergenerational poverty and subsequently achieved upward mobility. Participants came from diverse urban and rural communities in the Philippines and represented various professional and socioeconomic backgrounds. Selection criteria included having parents and grandparents who lived below the poverty line and demonstrating sustained socioeconomic improvement through education, employment, entrepreneurship, or professional achievement.

Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews designed to encourage participants to narrate their personal experiences of poverty, struggle, resilience, and transformation. Open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect on the cultural, societal, familial, and personal factors that shaped their journeys.

Data analysis followed a thematic narrative approach guided by repeated reading, coding, and cross-participant synthesis. Emerging patterns across participants' narratives were organized into resonant thematic threads that reflected shared experiences and meaning-making processes. Bowen Family Systems Theory, particularly the concept of differentiation of self, served as an interpretive lens in examining how family emotional processes and relational dynamics influenced participants' pathways out of poverty.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher also practiced reflexivity to ensure sensitivity and ethical responsibility in interpreting participants' lived experiences.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of participants' narratives revealed recurring patterns of meaning-making, adaptation, and transformation across their lived experiences of intergenerational poverty. Despite differences in background, geography, and profession, participants shared common relational and emotional processes that shaped their journeys toward upward mobility. These patterns were synthesized into four resonant threads collectively conceptualized as the RAFT of *Pag-Ahon (rising above poverty and diversity)* Framework: resilience, altruism, faith and formation, and tenacity.

Resilience: Enduring Scarcity Across Time

Participants consistently described experiences of prolonged deprivation, instability, and hardship during childhood and early adulthood. Many recounted growing up in overcrowded homes, experiencing food insecurity, engaging in informal labor at an early age, and witnessing financial conflict within the family. Despite these adversities, participants demonstrated the capacity to persist, adapt, and maintain future-oriented goals.

One participant recalled balancing multiple informal jobs while continuing education and supporting younger siblings. Others described using hardship as motivation to pursue professional achievement and economic stability. These narratives suggest that resilience was not merely an individual trait but a process shaped by relational support, meaning-making, and sustained perseverance over time.

From a Bowen Family Systems perspective, resilience may be understood as connected to differentiation of self. Participants demonstrated increasing emotional regulation and capacity for independent decision-making despite chronic family anxiety and socioeconomic stress. Rather than becoming emotionally fused with family hopelessness or dysfunction, many participants gradually developed greater clarity of self and intentionality in shaping their futures.

Altruism: Responsibility and Relational Commitment

A significant theme across narratives was the early assumption of responsibility toward family members. Participants frequently described sacrificing personal comfort, delaying individual goals, or assuming caregiving and financial provider roles to support siblings, parents, or extended relatives.

Several participants emphasized that their motivation to succeed was rooted not solely in personal ambition but in the desire to improve their family's condition. Financial achievement was often interpreted as a collective rather than purely individual accomplishment. These findings reflect the collectivist orientation of Filipino culture, where family obligation and relational interconnectedness strongly shape decision-making and life goals.

Bowen Family Systems Theory helps illuminate how participants navigated relational responsibilities while simultaneously pursuing individual growth. Although some participants experienced emotional burden and pressure within family systems, many developed healthier boundaries and differentiated functioning over time. Their narratives suggest that upward mobility involved not only financial advancement but also the capacity to maintain emotional connection without becoming overwhelmed by familial expectations.

Faith and Formation: Transformative Relationships Beyond the Family

Participants also identified the significant influence of mentors, educators, faith communities, employers, and supportive social networks in their journeys out of poverty. Many described encounters with individuals who affirmed their potential, provided guidance, or created opportunities that altered the trajectory of their lives.

Faith emerged as a particularly powerful source of meaning, hope, and emotional endurance. Participants frequently framed their struggles through spiritual language and interpreted their experiences as part of a larger purpose. Religious belief often functioned as both emotional support and a framework for sustaining perseverance during periods of uncertainty.

These findings reinforce existing literature suggesting that overcoming poverty is not achieved solely through economic intervention but also through the presence of supportive relational systems and psychologically sustaining beliefs. The narratives further demonstrate that transformative relationships beyond the immediate family can interrupt multigenerational cycles of hopelessness and limitation.

Tenacity: Intentional and Sustained Pursuit of Mobility

The final resonant thread centered on tenacity, reflected in participants' long-term commitment to personal advancement despite repeated setbacks and structural barriers. Participants described continuing education despite financial hardship, rebuilding after failures, enduring workplace discrimination, and persistently seeking opportunities for growth. Importantly, upward mobility was rarely described as immediate or linear. Participants emphasized that transformation occurred gradually over many years and often required emotional maturity, disciplined decision-making, and sustained self-development. Several narratives illustrated that success was not solely measured through financial stability but also through increased self-confidence, emotional independence, and the ability to create healthier family environments for future generations.

Viewed through Bowen's framework, these experiences reflect progressive differentiation of self across the lifespan. Participants increasingly demonstrated the ability to act according to personal principles and long-term goals rather than reacting solely to emotional pressures or environmental instability. Their narratives suggest that disrupting intergenerational poverty involves both economic mobility and emotional transformation within family systems.

Integrative Discussion and Implications

Collectively, the findings reveal that overcoming intergenerational poverty is a deeply relational and multidimensional process. Economic mobility alone does not fully explain participants' experiences. Instead, their narratives highlight the interplay among resilience, relational responsibility, supportive social connections, spirituality, and intentional selfdevelopment.

The findings also challenge deficit-based views of poverty that focus exclusively on pathology or dependency. Participants' stories illustrate the presence of agency, adaptive coping, and meaning-making even within contexts of severe disadvantage. At the same time, the narratives acknowledge that personal perseverance alone is insufficient without opportunities, supportive relationships, and broader social support systems.

The study contributes to family studies, counseling, and social development literature by emphasizing the importance of culturally grounded and family-sensitive approaches to poverty intervention. For mental health practitioners, the findings underscore the value of addressing chronic family anxiety, relational patterns, and emotional differentiation when working with individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For educators and policymakers, the study highlights the importance of mentorship, accessible education, community support systems, and long-term developmental interventions that move beyond short-term financial assistance.

Ultimately, the narratives demonstrate that intergenerational poverty can be disrupted through the convergence of relational support, emotional growth, cultural values, and sustained intentional action across time.

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of Filipino adults who successfully overcame intergenerational poverty through a qualitative narrative inquiry approach. The findings revealed that disrupting intergenerational poverty is not solely an economic achievement but a deeply relational, emotional, and developmental process shaped by resilience, altruism, faith and formation, and tenacity. Through the RAFT of *Pag-Ahon (rising above poverty and adversity)* Framework, the study illuminated how participants navigated chronic adversity, sustained family responsibilities, cultivated supportive relationships, and pursued long-term upward mobility despite enduring structural limitations.

The narratives further demonstrated that overcoming poverty involves progressive emotional growth and increasing differentiation of self within family systems. Guided by Bowen Family Systems Theory, the study highlighted how participants gradually developed emotional autonomy, intentional decision-making, and healthier relational patterns while remaining connected to their families and communities. These findings reinforce the importance of culturally grounded and family-sensitive approaches in understanding poverty disruption within the Philippine context.

The study contributes to literature on intergenerational poverty, family systems, resilience, and social mobility by centering the voices of Filipino adults whose experiences remain underrepresented in academic research. The findings may inform counseling practice, educational initiatives, community-based interventions, and policy development that recognize

the relational and meaning-making dimensions of poverty beyond purely economic indicators. Ultimately, the stories shared by participants demonstrate that while poverty may persist across generations, family legacies can be rewritten through perseverance, supportive relationships, emotional transformation, and intentional life choices.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the Filipino participants who generously shared their lived experiences and personal narratives, making this study possible. Deep appreciation is also extended to the dissertation panel and mentors from the Department of Family Studies of Miriam College for their guidance, encouragement, and scholarly insights throughout the research process. The author likewise acknowledges the unwavering support of family, friends, and colleagues whose encouragement sustained the completion of this study. Special thanks are extended to individuals and communities who contributed through mentorship, reflection, and meaningful conversations that enriched the development of this research. Above all, the author offers gratitude to God for the strength, wisdom, and perseverance granted throughout this academic journey.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that generative AI and AI-assisted technologies were used such as Grammarly in the organization, language refinement, and proofreading of portions of the manuscript. The use of these technologies was limited to improving clarity, coherence, grammar, and structural presentation. All core ideas, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions are original to the author and were derived from the careful and systematic conduct of the research. The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the manuscript.

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From Student Mobility to Human Capital Pathways: Reframing Asia–U.S. Educational Collaboration in an Era of Workforce Transformation

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

International education has long been framed through academic mobility, emphasizing degree attainment, credit transfer, and cross-cultural exposure. However, rapid technological change, demographic shifts, global labor shortages, and advances in artificial intelligence are reshaping the relationship between education, work, and mobility. In this context, traditional exchange models risk becoming increasingly disconnected from the realities facing students, institutions, and societies. This paper argues that international education must evolve from a mobility-centered paradigm toward integrated education-to-workforce pathways that intentionally connect academic learning, language development, cultural navigation, and employability outcomes. Drawing on more than three decades of practice-based experience in Asia–U.S. educational collaboration, the study adopts a conceptual and practice-informed approach to examine how cross-sector collaboration can support the design of global human capital systems. The paper highlights the growing importance of human-centered competencies—communication, adaptability, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and intercultural collaboration—in an AI-influenced global economy. It also addresses ethical challenges associated with workforce mobility, including equity, credential recognition, and labor vulnerability. By reframing international education as a bridge between learning and work, this study proposes a pathway-based model that supports sustainable human capital development, economic resilience, and shared prosperity. Ultimately, the effectiveness of international education should be measured not only by student mobility, but by the strength of pathways connecting education, employment, and human dignity.

Keywords: international education, human capital pathways, workforce development, Asia–U.S. collaboration, employability

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Introduction

International education has traditionally been framed as a system of academic mobility, emphasizing degree attainment, credit transfer, and cross-cultural exposure (Institute of International Education, 2025). However, rapid technological advancement, demographic shifts such as aging populations, persistent labor shortages, and the acceleration of artificial intelligence are fundamentally reshaping the relationship between education, work, and human mobility (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023).

In this changing landscape, a mobility-centered model of international education is becoming increasingly insufficient. While it enables the movement of students across borders, it does not necessarily ensure meaningful connections between education and workforce outcomes. Learners today navigate complex, transnational pathways in which education, employment, and long-term mobility are deeply interconnected (OECD, 2023).

These dynamics reveal a structural misalignment between education systems and labor markets. In response, this paper argues for a shift toward integrated human capital pathways that intentionally connect learning, mobility, and workforce participation (International Labour Organization [ILO], n.d.; OECD, 2023).

This paper contributes to the field by reframing international education as a system of global human capital pathways and proposing an integrated, pathway-based framework that connects education, workforce development, and mobility across borders.

Method and Scope

This paper adopts a conceptual and practice-informed approach. It does not aim to establish causal relationships through empirical data, but rather to synthesize macro-level trends, institutional practices, and over three decades of professional experience in international education and cross-border collaboration.

This study does not aim to test causal relationships but rather to develop a conceptual framework grounded in practice-based evidence and macro-level trends. The goal is to inform policy and institutional design rather than to generalize statistically.

Problem Statement

Despite its historical success, the traditional model of international education faces increasing limitations in addressing the complexities of the contemporary global environment. While mobility has facilitated cultural exchange and academic advancement, it often operates in isolation from workforce systems, resulting in a structural disconnect between education and employment outcomes (OECD, 2023).

Many international students encounter substantial barriers when attempting to translate educational achievement into meaningful career opportunities. These barriers include misalignment between academic programs and labor-market needs, inconsistent recognition of foreign credentials, and limited support for navigating cross-cultural professional environments (ILO, n.d.; OECD, 2023).

At the same time, technological transformation and artificial intelligence are redefining workforce requirements, placing greater emphasis on human-centered competencies such as adaptability, communication, and critical thinking (OECD, 2023).

These challenges highlight the need for a more integrated and human-centered framework for international education (ILO, n.d.).

Problem Background: Structural Misalignment in International Education and Workforce Systems

International education has traditionally been framed as a system of academic mobility, emphasizing degree attainment, credit transfer, and cross-cultural exposure (Institute of International Education, 2025). For decades, this model has played a central role in fostering global understanding and expanding access to higher education across borders. However, the global context in which international education operates is undergoing profound transformation.

Rapid technological advancement, demographic shifts such as aging populations, persistent labor shortages, and the acceleration of artificial intelligence are fundamentally reshaping the relationship between education, work, and human mobility (OECD, 2023). In this changing landscape, a mobility-centered model of international education is becoming increasingly insufficient.

While traditional models facilitate the movement of students across borders, they do not necessarily ensure meaningful connections between education and workforce outcomes. Learners today navigate complex, transnational pathways in which education, employment, and long-term mobility are deeply interconnected. At the same time, governments and industries face urgent workforce development challenges that require not only technical skills, but also global competencies such as adaptability, communication, and intercultural collaboration (OECD, 2023).

These developments reveal a structural misalignment between education systems, labor markets, and migration frameworks. Each system continues to evolve, often independently, resulting in fragmentation that limits both individual opportunity and broader economic efficiency. Education systems produce graduates, labor markets demand skills, and migration systems regulate movement—but these components are rarely designed as an integrated pathway.

In addition, the growing importance of human-centered competencies further complicates the situation. As automation reshapes labor markets, skills such as critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and intercultural communication are becoming increasingly essential. However, these competencies are not systematically embedded within traditional international education pathways (ILO, n.d.).

Ethical concerns also emerge within this fragmented system. Unequal access to global education, regulatory constraints, and the potential for labor vulnerability highlight the risks of a mobility system that is not supported by structured pathways. Without intentional integration, international education may reinforce existing inequalities rather than expand opportunity.

Taken together, these challenges suggest that the core issue is not the absence of talent or opportunity, but the absence of system design. International education continues to move students across borders, but it does not consistently connect learning to work in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

Case Study: The U.S.–ASEAN Talent Disconnect in an Era of Workforce and Investment Transformation

The structural misalignment outlined above becomes particularly visible when examining the relationship between the United States and ASEAN. This case highlights a broader global pattern in which talent, labor demand, and capital coexist, yet remain insufficiently connected.

In the United States, international education remains a significant asset. In the 2024/25 academic year, U.S. higher education institutions hosted 1,177,766 international students, representing about 6% of total enrollment (Institute of International Education, 2025). Among these students, 294,253 participated in Optional Practical Training (OPT), indicating strong demand for transition from education to employment.

International students also contribute substantially to the U.S. economy. In the same academic year, they generated approximately $42.9 billion in economic activity and supported 355,736 jobs (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2025). These figures demonstrate that international education is not only an academic system but also an economic engine.

At the same time, the U.S. labor market continues to experience significant unmet demand. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 6.882 million job openings in February 2026 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026). Additional indicators suggest persistent labor shortages, with some regions experiencing fewer available workers than job openings (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2025). In manufacturing, approximately 2.1 million jobs may remain unfilled by 2030, with substantial implications for economic output (Deloitte & The Manufacturing Institute, 2021).

Despite the coexistence of global talent and labor demand, pathways from education to long-term workforce participation remain fragile. While mechanisms such as OPT and H-1B visas exist, regulatory constraints, policy shifts, and labor-market dynamics have made long-term integration increasingly uncertain for international graduates.

Historically, the United States has demonstrated the potential of effectively integrating international talent. A significant proportion of high-growth technology companies, particularly in regions such as Silicon Valley, have been founded or co-founded by immigrants, including former international students. These contributions highlight the long-term economic and innovation benefits of sustained talent retention pathways.

In contrast, ASEAN represents a region of strong demographic and economic potential. The region has a youth population exceeding 200 million individuals aged 15–34 within a total population of approximately 650–680 million (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017, 2022). At the same time, ASEAN has emerged as a major destination for global investment, attracting approximately $230 billion in foreign direct investment in 2023 and accounting for about 17% of global FDI (ASEAN Secretariat & United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2024; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2024).

However, despite its demographic advantage and capital inflows, ASEAN continues to face structural challenges in workforce readiness. Skills mismatch has been identified as a persistent constraint affecting productivity and labor-market alignment (ILO, n.d.; OECD, 2023). Variations in training systems and uneven access to education further limit the region's ability to fully leverage its human capital.

This comparison reveals a critical global paradox. The United States possesses advanced education systems and strong labor demand but faces challenges in retaining international talent. ASEAN holds a large and growing workforce and increasing investment but struggles with skills alignment and workforce development.

The issue, therefore, is not the absence of talent, demand, or capital. Rather, it is the absence of structured pathways that connect these elements across systems and borders.

To address the structural disconnect identified above, this study proposes a conceptual model of Human Capital Pathways that integrates education, skills development, mobility, and workforce participation.

Figure 1

Human Capital Pathways: Bridging Education and Employment



Note. The model illustrates the integration of education, skills development, and workforce systems through structured pathways that support sustainable human capital outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the primary challenge in international education is not a shortage of talent, labor demand, or capital, but a lack of integration across education, workforce, and mobility systems (OECD, 2023). As demonstrated in the U.S.–ASEAN case, each of these elements exists in abundance; however, the absence of structured pathways prevents them from being effectively connected.

From a systems perspective, this issue can be understood as a form of institutional fragmentation. Education systems are primarily designed to deliver academic credentials, labor markets operate based on evolving skill demands, and migration systems regulate cross-border mobility. These systems are often developed independently, governed by different policy

frameworks, and aligned with distinct institutional objectives. As a result, individuals are required to navigate complex and disconnected transitions from education to employment, often without coordinated support (ILO, n.d.).

This fragmentation is further intensified by the accelerating transformation of the global economy. The rise of artificial intelligence and automation has increased the importance of human-centered competencies such as adaptability, critical thinking, and intercultural communication. However, these competencies are not systematically embedded within traditional international education models, which continue to prioritize academic achievement over workforce readiness (OECD, 2023).

In addition, regulatory and policy environments contribute to this disconnect. While mechanisms such as post-study work programs and employment visas exist, they are often limited in duration, competitive in allocation, and subject to policy shifts. These conditions create uncertainty for international graduates and reduce the likelihood of long-term workforce integration, even in the presence of strong labor demand.

Ethical considerations further complicate the issue. Unequal access to international education, disparities in institutional quality, and the potential for labor vulnerability highlight the risks of a system that facilitates mobility without ensuring protection or long-term opportunity. Without intentional system design, international education may inadvertently reinforce structural inequalities rather than expand equitable access to global opportunities (ILO, n.d.).

Taken together, these factors indicate that the limitations of international education are not rooted in individual capability, but in systemic design. A mobility-centered paradigm is no longer sufficient to address the complexity of the global workforce landscape. Instead, a pathway-based approach that integrates education, skills development, mobility, and employment is necessary to ensure that human potential can be effectively translated into meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Limitations

This study is conceptual and does not rely on primary empirical data or controlled case analysis. As such, the proposed framework should be understood as a strategic and interpretive model rather than a predictive or statistically validated system. Future research may test and refine this framework through empirical studies and comparative analysis.

Conclusion

International education can no longer be understood solely as student mobility. The central issue is not a shortage of talent, but a failure of system design.

Reframing international education as a system of global human capital pathways offers a more relevant and future-oriented approach. By integrating academic learning, language development, cultural navigation, and employability into a unified framework, stakeholders can create systems that are more coherent, inclusive, and economically effective.

The challenge ahead is not simply to expand access or increase mobility, but to redesign systems that enable individuals to translate learning into meaningful and dignified participation

in the global economy. In this sense, international education is no longer a sector, it is infrastructure for the future of human capital.

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Who Is a Teacher?

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Primary school teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly taking on relational responsibilities that involve supporting students' emotional and mental wellbeing. The role of the teacher now stretches beyond facilitating academic achievement to encompass wider pastoral and wellbeing support. This study examines how teachers conceptualise their professional identity as their work expands to include supporting children with compelling significant emotional and mental health needs. International and national evidence shows that teachers are working within a rapidly shifting landscape. Recent studies indicate that nearly half of primary teachers identify mental health and wellbeing as priority areas for professional learning, showing a growing expectation on teachers to respond to students' social and emotional needs alongside curriculum demands. Workload and wellbeing data further that teachers associate long hours, stress, and emotional labour with such complex expectations, especially those connected to student wellbeing. Limited attention has been given to how teachers make sense of these expanded demands. This research seeks to examine how primary school teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand understand themselves as professionals when responding to young learners' emotional and mental health needs. This study explores teachers' meaning-making processes and the ways they articulate, negotiate, and position their evolving professional identity. By centring teachers' own interpretations, the researcher offers insight into what it means to be a teacher in contemporary schools. Central to this inquiry are questions about how teachers define their role, navigate tensions, and construct professional identities within an educational environment characterised by increasing emotional responsibilities.

Keywords: teacher identity, teaching, mental health, hauora, learning

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to open a space for critical questioning by beginning to untangle the assumptions about what teaching is, what it demands, and how teachers come to understand themselves within these shifting emotional landscapes. Rather than offering definitive answers, this article invites reflection on how teachers navigate the boundaries of their role, how emotional labour becomes woven into professional identity, and what it means to teach in contexts where care, wellbeing, and relational responsiveness are increasingly central (Barrie, 2024). In doing so, it encourages readers to consider not only what teachers do, but who teachers are becoming in contemporary schooling. Therefore, the researcher asks the teachers, Who is a teacher from the teacher's point of view?

Primary school teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly expected to support students' emotional and mental wellbeing alongside their academic learning, reflecting a profound shift in the nature of teachers' work (Bonne, 2023; O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020). Teaching has traditionally been viewed as academically focused and largely rational in orientation, whereas contemporary 21st-century classrooms demand far greater engagement with relational, pastoral, and emotional dimensions of practice. International scholarship similarly shows that teachers' work has expanded beyond instructional tasks to incorporate emotional and wellbeing related responsibilities, often without adequate preparation or systemic support (Day, 2018; Noddings, 2012). In the New Zealand context, teachers' roles more recently has involved more complex pastoral and emotional labour beyond curriculum delivery, frequently under conditions of limited preparation and system-level guidance (Sinnema et al., 2021). This intensification aligns with evidence showing that teachers are positioned as frontline responders to children's distress, navigating responsibilities that extend into counselling-adjacent and relational domains (O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020; Sinnema et al., 2021).

The New Zealand National Survey of Primary Schools shows that there is about forty eight percent of primary teachers who chose student wellbeing and mental health as a priority area for professional learning (Bonne, 2023). Thus illustrating a growing expectation that teachers simultaneously respond to students' social and emotional needs alongside curriculum demands (Bonne, 2023). Teachers also report long hours, heightened stress, and substantial emotional labour associated with these responsibilities, particularly when supporting children experiencing instability or intense emotional and mental health challenges (O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020; Sinnema et al., 2021). Teachers subconsciously feel morally and professionally responsible to respond to distress frequently, but report insufficient training, guidance, and confidence (Caruana, 2022; McDowall, 2021).

Existing research tends to examine discrete experiences such as bereavement (Caruana, 2022), parental separation (McLean, 2015), or trauma-informed practice (Barrie, 2023, 2024), however rarely considers severe emotional and mental wellbeing needs as a coherent category of emotional experience that teachers encounter on a day-to-day basis in schools and classrooms. Even less is known about how teachers conceptualise their professional identity as their work expands into these emotionally charged domains (McDowall, 2021; O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020).

Within the context of primary school and classrooms, some important questions for contemporary educational scholarship that the researcher raises are: *How do teachers understand their role when children experience severe emotional distress or disruption? What*

boundaries, responsibilities, and identity positions do teachers draw upon when responding to such experiences? And how do these conceptualisations intersect with the broader intensification of teachers' work within the context of education in a classroom setting?

These questions matter to the researcher of this article as severe emotional needs and wellbeing challenges are not exceptional events in children's lives. New Zealand data show that large numbers of primary-aged children experience bereavement, parental separation, migration-related disruption, promote care transitions, or loss of safety due to family violence (Fauth et al., 2019; McLean, 2015; Ministry of Justice, 2022; Oranga Tamariki, 2023). Children's emotional needs arising from trauma, grief, loss and instability manifest within the classroom, and teachers are responding often alone, often uncertain, and often without recognition (McDowall, 2021; O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020). Teachers' responses to such complex needs are shaped not only by minimal exposure to appropriate training and school systems, but also by their own professional identities, moral commitments, and cultural frameworks (Alisic et al., 2012).

In examining the emotional labour and demands involved supporting students with telling emotional and mental health needs, this article opens a dialogic space for questioning, inviting teachers and readers alike to reflect on how the meaning of "being a teacher" is understood, lived, and continually re-interpreted. The emotional dimensions of teachers' work remain conceptually under theorised in Aotearoa New Zealand. Hence emotional and wellbeing-related support expose the tensions teachers navigate between care and curriculum, relational presence and professional boundaries, cultural obligations and institutional constraints. Attending to how teachers conceptualise these responsibilities offers a powerful window into what it means to be a teacher in contemporary primary schools.

The Expanding Role of Primary Teachers

Over the past two decades, the role of primary teachers has broadened, internationally and within Aotearoa New Zealand. Historically positioned as curriculum deliverers, teachers are now expected to engage in relational, pastoral, and wellbeing oriented work as part of their everyday practice (Day, 2018; Noddings, 2012). This shift is reinforced by policy changes that emphasise inclusion, wellbeing, and relational practice, effectively extending teachers' responsibilities into domains traditionally associated with social work or counselling (Sinnema et al., 2021). For example, the newly published *Aotearoa New Zealand Teaching Standards* (Teaching Council, 2024) expand the expectations placed on teachers by explicitly recognising trauma as one of the diverse learner needs teachers must understand and respond to. Standard 3, Focus Area 3.2 requires teachers to "demonstrate understanding of the diverse needs of learners – including those associated with neurodivergence, disabilities, and trauma – and of the learning strategies that can support them," (Teaching Council, 2024, Standard 3.2) signalling a formalised expectation that trauma related needs are part of everyday pedagogical practice. This inclusion extends teachers' responsibilities beyond academic instruction into domains that involve relational, emotional, and wellbeing-oriented work, echoing wider research showing that teachers are increasingly positioned as frontline responders to complex emotional needs (O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020; Sinnema et al., 2021). Such a shift raises important questions about how teachers understand and negotiate their professional identity when expectations increasingly encompass emotional, relational, and therapeutic forms of labour. If trauma responsiveness is now embedded within the official standards that define *what it means to be a teacher, what implications does this have for how teachers see themselves,*

how they interpret their responsibilities, and how the boundaries of teaching are being re-drawn in contemporary schooling?

International literature similarly documents the intensification of teachers' work. Studies describe teachers as "first responders" to children's emotional distress, often absorbing responsibilities that exceed their formal training or role descriptions (Brunzell et al., 2016; Southall, 2023). These expanded expectations contribute to increased workload, emotional strain, and a sense of professional ambiguity as teachers navigate competing demands (Craig, 2012; Hargreaves, 2000).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, this intensification is particularly pronounced. O'Connor and Macdonald (2020) argue that teachers' work has become "increasingly complex," with rising pastoral demands and heightened public scrutiny. Teachers report long hours, stress, and emotional labour associated with supporting students experiencing instability, distress, or weighty mental health challenges. Hence teachers frequently feel morally and professionally responsible to respond to distress but… report insufficient training, guidance, and confidence (McDowall, 2021; O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020).

Emotional Labour and Teacher Identity

The expansion of teachers' wellbeing responsibilities has brought emotional labour to the forefront of educational scholarship. Emotional labour refers to the work of managing one's own emotions and often those of others in professional contexts (Hochschild, 2012). For teachers, this includes providing calm, relational support to distressed students, regulating classroom climate, and maintaining emotional composure despite personal strain (Noddings, 2012).

Research shows that emotional labour is deeply intertwined with teachers' professional identity. Teachers often draw on moral commitments, relational values, and personal beliefs about care when responding to students' emotional needs (McDowall, 2021). However, emotional labour is not formally recognised in most role descriptions or policy frameworks. This may create tensions between what teachers feel responsible for and what the system acknowledges or supports. Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand spotlight this gap, indicating that teachers frequently provide emotional support "by default" because no other professionals are consistently available (Barrie, 2024; The Education Hub, 2022). This invisibility contributes to role ambiguity, emotional exhaustion, and identity strain.

Responding to Students' Emotional and Mental Health Needs

Students' emotional and mental health needs are increasingly visible in primary classrooms. New Zealand data indicate that large numbers of children experience disruptions such as parental separation, family violence, migration-related instability, foster care transitions, and bereavement (Fauth et al., 2019; McLean, 2015; Ministry of Justice, 2022; Oranga Tamariki, 2023). These experiences often manifest as emotional dysregulation, behavioural changes, or difficulties with learning and concentration in classrooms and schools (Education Review Office, 2022).

Teachers are typically the adults who spend the most time with children during these periods of instability, positioning them as key figures in children's emotional worlds. However, research consistently shows that teachers feel underprepared to respond to complex emotional

needs, particularly when these needs fall outside traditional pedagogical boundaries (Caruana, 2022; McDowall, 2021). Teachers often rely on intuition, personal experience, or relational instincts rather than formal training, which can lead to uncertainty and emotional strain.

Despite the prevalence of emotional and mental health needs in classrooms, scholarship has not fully examined how teachers conceptualise their role in this space. Existing studies tend to focus on specific experiences such as bereavement, parental separation, or trauma-related behaviours rather than the broader category of severe emotional and mental health needs that teachers encounter daily. This leaves a conceptual gap in understanding how teachers make sense of their responsibilities and how these interpretations shape their professional identity.

The New Zealand Context

Recent New Zealand research provides compelling evidence that the role of primary school teachers has expanded in ways that directly intensify their emotional labour and pastoral responsibilities (Dunn, 2022). A large-scale qualitative study by O'Connor and Macdonald (2020) found that primary teachers increasingly act as "first responders" to children's emotional distress, often providing support for issues such as family breakdown, bereavement, and instability, tasks that fall well outside traditional academic instruction. Their study elucidates that teachers feel a growing expectation to manage complex wellbeing needs without adequate training or systemic support, contributing to what they describe as "emotional overload" in the profession. Similarly, Sinnema et al. (2021) report that policy shifts in Aotearoa New Zealand have placed heightened emphasis on wellbeing, inclusion, and relational practice, effectively broadening teachers' roles into domains previously associated with social work or counselling.

Research also consistently shows that the role of primary school educators has expanded far beyond traditional academic instruction (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2024). Historically, teachers were positioned primarily as deliverers of curriculum content, but contemporary scholarship describes their work as multidimensional, relational, and increasingly complex. New Zealand's national surveys of primary schools emphasise that teachers now routinely engage in pastoral care, social–emotional support, cultural responsiveness, and community engagement alongside teaching (NZCER, 2024). This aligns with international literature describing teaching as "beset with different challenges and dilemmas" due to rising expectations, accountability pressures, and the need to respond to diverse learner needs (Ball, 2003; Craig, 2012; Hargreaves, 2000, as summarised in Teachers and Teaching, 2019).

The Aotearoa New Zealand context adds further complexity to teachers' wellbeing related responsibilities. Policy frameworks emphasise holistic development, inclusion, and relational practice, aligning with Māori worldviews (whanaungatanga) that foreground collective wellbeing and the interconnectedness of emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of learning (Sinnema et al., 2021). Teachers therefore navigate not only institutional expectations but also cultural obligations, including commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand) and culturally responsive practice (O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020).

At the same time, systemic supports for wellbeing work remain inconsistent. Schools vary widely in access to counsellors, social workers, and specialist services, leaving teachers managing complex emotional needs with limited guidance. This mismatch between

expectations and support structures intensifies the emotional labour of teaching and contributes to role ambiguity (Barrie, 2024; The Education Hub, 2022).

These findings reinforce that teachers' work is not only changing but becoming more emotionally demanding, making the study of how teachers experience and respond to children's grief and loss both timely and necessary. With such strong evidence that the role of teachers is changing rapidly, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand. Recent analyses describe a "changing policy scape" in which teachers face intensified public scrutiny, shifting curriculum demands, and increased emotional labour (Cook et al., 2025). Teachers report working in "increasingly complex and diverse settings," requiring new professional learning and adaptive expertise (Livingston, 2017, as cited in Core Education's Ten Trends). These changes include:

- Greater responsibility for student wellbeing, including responding to grief, trauma, mental health issues and family instability.
- More pastoral and relational work, often without additional time or training Alisic et al. (2012).
- Increased collaboration in innovative learning environments, where multiple teachers share responsibility for larger groups of students.
- Heightened expectations for cultural competence, including obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Barrie, 2024).
- Growing administrative and accountability pressures, reducing time for relational work (Bonne, 2023).

Such shifts are directly relevant to the researcher's study because they show that teachers are increasingly expected to support children through emotionally complex experiences such as grief and loss despite limited preparation, resources, or systemic recognition of this part of their role.

Conclusion

This preliminary framing of the researcher's thinking illustrates a profession in motion, where primary teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are continually renegotiating what it means to be a teacher amid expanding emotional and mental wellbeing expectations (Biesta, 2022; O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020; Sinnema et al., 2021). As teachers describe the ways they respond to students' complex needs, their accounts reveal an identity landscape shaped by competing demands, personal values, institutional pressures, and shifting societal expectations. These early insights suggest that teachers are actively constructing meaning around their widening roles, often navigating tensions between curriculum responsibilities and relational care. This raises important implications for how teachers understand and position their professional role, as they negotiate shifting expectations and expanding emotional responsibilities in their daily practice (O'Connor & Macdonald, 2020).

Emerging patterns in this ongoing study also resonate with Biesta's (2022) critique of the therapeutic turn in education, which cautions against schooling becoming increasingly oriented toward psychological support at the expense of its broader educational purposes. Teachers' narratives in this research highlights how this shift is experienced at the classroom level, where emotional labour becomes intertwined with professional identity in ways that are both meaningful and challenging (Levkovich & Elyoseph, 2021). Their reflections raise important questions about how far the boundaries of teaching can stretch, and what forms of recognition,

preparation, and structural support are needed as wellbeing work becomes embedded in everyday practice.

Rather than offering definitive conclusions, this study opens space for continued inquiry into how teachers understand and sustain their work within this expansive landscape. It invites further examination of how educational systems might respond to the realities of contemporary classrooms, where emotional responsibilities are no longer peripheral but central to teachers' professional lives. In doing so, the research contributes to an ongoing conversation about the future of teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand, one that acknowledges the complexity of teachers' relational labour and the shifting contours of their professional identity.

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The Elephant Vanishes, *TV People*, and Identity in Modern Japan

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This essay examines how Haruki Murakami utilizes magical realism to critique the destabilization of individual identity within Japan's collectivist social framework. Focusing on two works of short fiction, *The Elephant Vanishes* and *TV People*, this essay explores theories of isolation and societal displacement. A literary analysis supported by sociological theory illustrates how Murakami's works, and more specifically his use of magical realism, embody the tension between the individual and the collective within modern Japanese society. Through this lens, notions of social conformity, institutional pressure, and the psychological weight of maintaining surface-level social harmony are deconstructed.

Keywords: magical realism, Haruki Murakami, identity, Japanese collectivism, alienation

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Introduction

Modern Japan is characterized by a high degree of public order. Despite the colossal population density of megacities like Tokyo, Japan's urban centers are widely considered safe and quiet. Throughout Japan, social harmony is deeply valued, and a peculiar quirk of this harmony is the notable absence of public trash bins. Even without these bins, streets are often clean and well-maintained. This curious reality reflects an institutionalized collective sense of accountability. It is the expectation that people will carry their waste home with them, even if it is inconvenient. To an external observer, this may seem utopian. However, this policy decision is tied to a historical trauma that reveals a more complex reality within Japan. The widespread removal of public trash bins occurred directly after the March 20, 1995, Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks, when the *Aum Shinrikyo* cult weaponized trash bins to disperse a deadly nerve agent. In a sense, the clean and orderly streets of Japan are utopian in appearance alone, and the chaotic history signals a deeper fragility within Japanese society. Social harmony may be resilient, but it is also uniquely delicate. A persistent tension between individual consciousness and collective expectations contextualizes this dilemma.

This internal friction is a primary thematic focus for Murakami, whose short fiction requires readers to consider a central question: Is magical realism an effective conduit for exploring identity and alienation in modern Japanese society? Rather than presenting magical realism as a mere escape from reality, this essay asserts that Murakami's depictions of the surreal serve as a narrative device to capture the reality of ordinary individuals becoming detached from their collectivist structures. This detachment induces profound isolation, rendering the individual socially invisible, ultimately resulting in a destabilization of selfhood.

To understand the psychological displacement of Murakami's protagonists, one must first explore how identity is constructed and maintained within Japanese culture. Nakane (1970) explains that social organization in Japan is primarily dictated by vertical relationships. Within this framework, an individual's identity is defined less by personal attributes than by systemic placement within a designated group, such as a school, association, or corporation. The collective frame takes clear priority over the individual attribute, meaning that individual expression is often moderated in favor of maintaining group cohesion. This structural analysis is supported by Doi (1973) in his psychological framework of *amae*, defined as a form of emotional dependence that binds individuals to group expectations and institutional hierarchies. Constrained by mutual obligation and vertical alignment, displays of individuality are discouraged, as the self is understood primarily as a component of a larger whole.

Murakami constructs his protagonists as direct products of this social conditioning. Across his short fiction, his main characters are consistently ordinary, nameless men working routine corporate jobs. They are emotionally detached, quiet, and deeply embedded in repetitive daily routines. Their anonymity reflects a broader social condition where identity is secondary to group belonging. They operate smoothly within a highly organized system until they are confronted with a moment of surreal disruption.

Murakami's use of magical realism is the catalyst for this disruption. In his research, Strecher (1999) emphasizes that identity fragmentation is the essential foundation for Murakami's magical realism and Nakane's sociological framework further explains why this fragmentation invariably leads to social exclusion. By placing ordinary characters within unexplainable situations, Murakami cuts the strings that bind them to conventional, group logic. Surreal events force Murakami's protagonists to step outside their shared cognitive framework of the

collective, crossing the void into a reality that is far more complex. As sole witnesses to magical events, Murakami's protagonists are forever changed and unable to return to the illusion of harmony. Thus, we begin to understand the descent into identity destabilization.

Literature Review

The Elephant Vanishes

Murakami's short story *The Elephant Vanishes* (1993) introduces readers to a protagonist who is a prototypical corporate kitchen appliance salesman. The nameless protagonist's life is built around predictable social interactions. One evening, he witnesses an event that shatters his normal routine; while walking home, he notices the close bond between an elephant and its keeper who reside together in the local city park. Alone, he watches the pair carefully, contemplating their relationship when suddenly, the elephant and keeper shrink in size until they have vanished. In a state of shock, the protagonist cannot believe what has transpired. Yet, the events of the next day confirm the impossible.

Reports of an escaped elephant and elephant keeper appear on the front page of local newspapers, suggesting a temporary shared reality. However, as the official search extends for months without providing any logical explanations, public interest quickly wanes. The mystery remains unsolved and the story subsequently vanishes from public discourse. Despite the unfathomable disappearance of an elephant in the middle of a crowded Tokyo suburb, society resumes its normal routines. For the collective, institutional order remains a resilient base to lean upon in this moment of temporary uncertainty, but for the protagonist, a return to normalcy is unacceptable.

The protagonist becomes preoccupied with the vanishing elephant, and his internal world begins to unravel. He obsessively collects news clippings about the missing elephant in a hopeless attempt to hold onto some semblance of a shared reality. Instead, the fading public interest reflected in the news articles only serves to further destabilize the protagonist. When he attempts to articulate his experience or express his lingering doubts, the protagonist encounters indifference or quiet dismissal from his coworkers who cannot understand why he would break away from conventional norms to discuss a subject so absurd. He finds himself unable to maintain *tatemae*, the essential public facade used to preserve social harmony. His former identity slowly erodes as he can no longer engage with the routines and mannerisms typical of corporate vertical relationships. The elephant's disappearance shatters the logical order that once structured the protagonist's life, leaving him stranded outside the collective consciousness.

TV People

A similar manifestation of alienation occurs in Murakami's short story *TV People* (1993). While the unnamed protagonist is spending a quiet evening at home, an odd group of men referred to as "TV people" enter through the front door without warning to install a new television set. While sitting on the couch, silently watching the installation crew, the protagonist realizes that not a single word had been exchanged between him and the men who are now wandering through his home, and for a brief moment, he wonders if he is invisible. The TV people continue working without making eye contact, speaking, or acknowledging him in any way. They treat him as if he were entirely non-existent, and, as if suspended in a liminal space, the protagonist begins to question his own reality.

This surreal disruption becomes even more glaring when the protagonist notices the same TV people at his workspace the following day. As they are moving through his office, none of his coworkers acknowledge their presence. The protagonist cannot understand why everyone is unwilling to see what is right in front of them. Later that night, the boundaries between the real and the surreal become increasingly unstable. While sitting on his couch watching television, the protagonist notices that the TV people are now inside his television set. They are building something that they call an airplane, but it does not look like an airplane. The protagonist starts to wonder if his absent wife is having an affair, a reality that he has noticed before, but not consciously so. Suddenly, the protagonist is aware of everything all at once, and that nothing is as it seems. In this state of psychological disarray, the TV people begin emerging directly from the TV set, further warping the boundaries between real and surreal.

As Napier (1996) observes in her research, modern Japanese literature frequently explores themes of identity fragmentation in response to intense social pressures and rapid modernization. In *TV People*, the division separating the conscious from the subconscious, and the real from the imaginary, is eroded. By holding an awareness of an anomaly that his colleagues remain oblivious to, the protagonist experiences profound isolation. He remains physically present in his office and home, yet he has been rendered socially invisible, severed from the shared reality that previously anchored his identity.

Intertextual Analysis

When examined side by side, *The Elephant Vanishes* and *TV People* reveal a structured, narrative progression that illustrates how Murakami perceives social harmony and alienation. Murakami relies on these narrative steps to map out the systematic decoupling of the individual from their collective framework. We can analyze the following sequences across both narratives:

Disruption and Cognitive Divide

Murakami's narrative arcs rely upon an unexplainable event that shatters conceptions of shared reality. In *The Elephant Vanishes*, this occurs when an elephant and its keeper inexplicably shrink and vanish. In *TV People*, the disruption is marked by the unannounced arrival of reality-defying figures who install a television set in the protagonist's home. These incidents fracture the everyday logic that previously governed the protagonists' lives, thus planting the seeds of existential doubt. The rifts between the protagonists' perception and that of the community widen as their shared realities diverge. While the kitchen appliance salesman vividly remembers the elephant and continues to look for answers, the local public quickly loses interest and forgets the event. Similarly, the corporate worker in *TV People* observes the silent figures within his office workspace, while his colleagues remain entirely oblivious. At this stage, the individual develops a private awareness that separates them from their respective groups.

Institutional Continuation and Social Alienation

Despite the profound rupture experienced by each protagonist, the surrounding social apparatus remains rigid. The local government and community in *The Elephant Vanishes* simply accepts that an elephant has disappeared, preferring to simply forget rather than explore the profound implications of such an event. The corporate office in *TV People* continues its daily routine without pause and the protagonist's coworkers are unable to see or perhaps unwilling to notice

disruptions to their established norms. By acting as though nothing out of the ordinary has occurred, the collective actively enforces conformity, prioritizing institutional stability over the disruptive truth witnessed by individuals. As the protagonists find themselves unable to reconcile their private experiences with the collective denial, or group inability to perceive difference, their capacity to function within vertical relationships is frayed. The appliance salesman struggles to maintain a public façade, *tatemae*, and begins to drift away from his orderly and simple life. Similarly, the corporate worker in *TV People* withdraws into a state of silent observation, becoming completely cut off from the professional and personal circles that previously defined him. The result is an inescapable isolation.

Destabilization of Self

The final stage of Murakami's pattern offers no resolution or social reintegration. Instead, the narrative concludes at the point of existential collapse. The salesman in *The Elephant Vanishes* is left feeling completely aimless and adrift in a world that has lost its objective meaning, while the corporate worker in *TV People* is physically frozen as the uncanny figures step directly out of the television screen. Both protagonists' sense of self becomes fully destabilized as they are severed from the shared reality of the group, and they are rendered socially invisible.

Murakami and the *Zenkyōtō* Movement

Murakami's structural pattern highlights a fundamental tension within Japanese society. When an individual experiences a disruption that cannot be integrated into the group's shared reality, the system does not adapt to accommodate them. Instead, the collective continues unchanged, leaving the non-conforming individual isolated and conceptually erased. This sense of alienation and identity fragmentation reflects cultural and philosophical tensions within modern Japan that have had significant historical implications. Strecher's (1999) research links Murakami's exploration of social identity to a key political event, which he asserts had a meaningful impact on Murakami's literature: Japan's 1968 and 1969 student-led protests, known as the *Zenkyōtō* movement. The *Zenkyōtō* movement was a massive, anti-establishment mobilization driven by an existentialist desire for authentic self-expression. Students actively questioned whether they were truly free, or if they were simply being taught to conform with others and fulfill the desires of a highly bureaucratic corporate state. When the movement collapsed in the early 1970s, it left behind a profound sense of cultural defeatism. Many participants eventually integrated into the very consumerist, corporate structures they had protested against.

Murakami's literature captures the lingering effects of this transition. He has reflected that modern Japanese society faces an ongoing existential crisis, suggesting that individuals are losing their capacity to understand themselves (Strecher, 1999). Within his narratives, an uncompromising corporate culture that devalues individuality acts as a primary source of his protagonists' existential suffering. As Loughman (1997) articulates in her research, within Japan's corporate landscape, group identification with an institution is of primary importance, while the attributes of the individual are treated as secondary. To maintain standing within the corporate group, individuals are often expected to adjust their appearance, behavior, and personal time to match established company norms, and Murakami's narratives clearly define the costs of non-conformity. Any disruption of the status quo can leave an individual completely isolated and unable to reintegrate.

Conclusion

Murakami offers no explicit solutions in his writing. His protagonists never successfully overcome their corporate structures, nor do they achieve a triumphant sense of individuality. Instead, they end their journeys suspended in a permanent state of uncertainty, isolated from a modern society they no longer belong to. Murakami's fiction ultimately invites readers to reconsider how modern social institutions shape individual identity and belonging. His depictions of alienation suggest that this condition may emerge whenever collective stability is maintained at the expense of individual subjectivity. Murakami’s narratives reveal that a profound threat to contemporary identity is not overt exclusion from society, but rather active participation in a system that quietly and systematically renders the individual invisible.

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Persistence of Form: Operational Memory and Material Continuity

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper reexamines traditional symbolic and representational accounts of form persistence from a material and process-oriented perspective. Moving beyond explanations centred primarily on cultural transmission, it develops the concept of operational memory to describe how formal configurations endure through embodied practice, material engagement, and perceptual coherence. Drawing on examples from sculpture, architecture, and material culture, the study highlights the active role of matter, bodily action, and perceptual organisation in maintaining recognisable and adaptable forms across different historical contexts. By foregrounding the relational and operative conditions that sustain form, the research offers a nuanced account of continuity, showing how recognition, coherence, and reactivation emerge through recurrent material and organisational principles rather than from fixed symbolic meanings alone. In doing so, it proposes a framework for understanding how forms remain operative despite changing circumstances, while also opening new avenues for investigating the connections between materiality, perception, and cultural persistence.

Keywords: operational memory, form persistence, perceptual continuity, mythic recognition, material culture

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Introduction

Across different historical periods and cultural contexts, certain forms continue to reappear despite profound transformations in belief systems, symbolic frameworks, and modes of representation. Their persistence suggests that continuity cannot be fully explained through cultural transmission or inherited meaning. Instead, forms endure because they can be reproduced through recurring relationships of material engagement and spatial organisation. Drawing on artistic research and comparative visual analysis, the study introduces the concept of operational memory to describe how formal configurations are maintained through enactment rather than preserved as fixed representations. Using selected examples from sculpture, material culture, and the built environment, the paper explores how continuity emerges and why certain forms remain recognisable, adaptable, and effective despite changing cultural circumstances. By reconsidering persistence as an operative rather than symbolic phenomenon, the study offers a process-based account of formal continuity grounded in material, perceptual, and embodied conditions.

Methodological Approach

This study adopts a practice-based, comparative approach rooted in artistic research, phenomenological observation, and material analysis. It examines a curated selection of examples drawn from diverse artistic contexts. The selected works are understood not as disciplinary categories but as manifestations of enduring formal relationships. The analysis focuses on material stability, spatial organisation, perceptual coherence, and embodied engagement as operative conditions that support the persistence and transformation of form over time. Through comparison, the study examines how material properties and perceptual organisation interact in fostering formal resilience.

Conceptual Framework

This paper reexamines traditional understandings of the persistence of form, which often rely on a representation-based model where forms endure because they carry meanings transmitted across time through tradition, myth, or cultural memory. Such accounts assume that the continuity of form depends primarily on symbolic frameworks, presupposing that meaning precedes and sustains form. Instead, this research distinguishes between two interconnected questions: the persistence of the visual and material configuration itself, and the ongoing operative capacity of that form across shifting contexts. While a form may retain its visual configuration, this does not necessarily explain why it continues to generate coherence, recognition, or affective resonance when its original symbolic meanings are no longer shared or relevant.

By shifting the focus from symbolic representation to the function and operation of forms, the inquiry is reframed: it becomes less about what forms mean and more about how they function within perceptual and material environments. This perspective aligns with approaches viewing making as a form of embodied knowledge production grounded in material engagement (Ingold, 2013), emphasising that perception is rooted in bodily experience prior to conceptual interpretation—a view articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962). Moreover, it shares important affinities with material agency theories that see matter not as passive but as an active participant in shaping and maintaining form, as proposed by Bennett (2010). Rather than framing agency as an attribute of objects, this paper investigates the operative conditions—material, perceptual, and spatial—that enable forms to persist and

remain operative across different environments. Taken together, these perspectives offer a nuanced understanding of form persistence, foregrounding material engagement and perceptual continuity over symbolic or representational stability.

Material Conditions of Persistence

Materiality plays a central role in this account. Forms do not persist in abstraction; they are sustained by the properties and constraints of materials. These constraints include physical forces such as gravity, structural stability, and resistance, which shape the range of viable configurations.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the persistence of formal configurations occurs when similar material conditions give rise to effective spatial solutions. In the Alhambra, the arch functions simultaneously as a load-bearing element and as a device for organising movement, framing views, and articulating transitions between spaces. Although deeply embedded in a specific cultural framework, its stability depends on material and engineering principles common to arch construction throughout a wide range of architectural traditions.

Figure 1
Comparative Example of Formal Persistence: Alhambra Arch (Spain, 13th–15th centuries) and Gateway Arch (United States, 1965)



Source: My Travel Monkey; Unsplash.

Built in 1965, the Gateway Arch—conceived within a different historical and technological era—relies on comparable engineering principles. Its monumental scale and stainless-steel construction transform the arch into a modern landmark associated with expansion, mobility, and national identity. Despite differences in meaning and function, its integrity depends on the efficient transfer of forces characteristic of arch systems, which channel loads through a continuous curved form.

While the selected examples differ in context, both rely on recurring relational arrangements that organise space, distribute forces, and maintain coherence. Their endurance does not hinge on continuity of symbolic significance but on the ongoing viability of the material and mechanical principles from which they originate. This comparison suggests that certain forms remain reproducible because they successfully respond to similar material conditions, enabling their persistence and reactivation across changing cultural environments.

Operational Memory of Form

To account for this phenomenon, this paper introduces the concept of operational memory of form, defined here as the capacity of certain formal configurations to remain active through repeated material engagement and embodied practice. Within this framework, form is understood not as a fixed or static entity, but as a dynamic set of operative relationships. Attributes such as weight, balance, resistance, gesture, and spatial orientation do not function as isolated qualities; instead, they constitute enduring conditions through which forms are generated, sustained, and reshaped.

Operational memory therefore resides in action rather than representation. It is not stored as a symbolic image or transmitted as a fixed model. Instead, it persists through the continued reproduction of connections linking material conditions, bodily practices, and spatial organisation. What endures is not the preservation of a specific form, but the recurrence of principles that make such configurations viable.

From this perspective, formal continuity becomes a function of reproducibility within material constraints and embodied modes of engagement. Forms remain effective because the principles that sustain them can be enacted under different historical, cultural, and material circumstances. As the examples discussed in this paper suggest, operational memory thus provides a framework for understanding how forms persist, adapt, and regain effectiveness.

Perceptual Continuity

While material conditions provide a necessary foundation for the persistence of form, they do not fully account for the sense of coherence and significance that forms can generate in human experience. Perception also plays a crucial role, allowing such configurations to be apprehended as coherent wholes through embodied experience.

For example, the pyramids—such as the Pyramid of Khafre and the Louvre Pyramid—demonstrate how similar perceptual principles can sustain recognition despite vast differences in material, scale, and cultural meaning. These forms rely on features such as axial symmetry, geometric stability, a clear upward movement, and hierarchical spatial orientation—elements that serve as perceptual anchors. The broad base and converging sides reinforce a sense of balance, directionality, and visual unity, making the configuration immediately legible as a coherent spatial whole.

Figure 2
The Pyramidal Form Across Historical Contexts: Pyramid of Khafre (c. 2570 BCE) and Louvre Pyramid (1989).



Source: Dreamstime; Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Figure 2 illustrates this cross-temporal perceptual continuity, showing how recurring geometric principles can remain legible and stable despite substantial differences. Although separated by thousands of years, both pyramids depend on similar spatial principles that activate embodied modes of experience rooted in Gestalt psychology and ecological approaches to perception (Gibson, 1979). Symmetry, balance, and figure-ground relationships facilitate the organisation of visual information into recognisable patterns, allowing forms to be perceived as stable and coherent. These structures operate at a pre-conceptual level, engaging bodily experience and acquired perceptual habits that support recognition via embodied engagement. Rather than being assembled through conscious interpretation, the configuration is experienced as an organised unity through processes that precede reflective judgement. Consequently, even when symbolic or cultural associations change, the coherence of these forms persists.

Perceptual continuity thus works in tandem with material stability. While physical conditions explain how forms can endure, organisational strategies account for why they remain recognisable and meaningful. By grounding recognition in embodied experience and relational configurations, structures like the pyramids exemplify how perceptual coherence sustains formal persistence across different environments. This dynamic process underscores that recognition is active and relational, rooted in bodily engagement with spatial and visual cues rather than primarily in symbolic meaning or cultural memory.

Operational Memory and Reactivation

Operational memory becomes most evident when a form persists despite changes in its surrounding conditions. While material continuity accounts for its physical viability and perceptual continuity explains its immediate legibility, operational memory helps explain how it can be reactivated under new circumstances.

As shown in Figure 3, the central form retains its coherence while geometric modifications in the supporting base alter the associations that emerge around it. Although the surrounding structures suggest different interpretations, the primary form is still perceived as the same entity. Its persistence does not depend on the continuity of a particular meaning, but on the recurrence of principles that remain operative across different formal arrangements.

Figure 3

Persistence of a Formal Configuration Across Different Supporting Geometries



Note. Artwork and photograph by Olga Cuxart Oriol. © 2025.

This example illustrates how forms can be adapted, repositioned, and reinterpreted without losing their fundamental identity. Operational memory is therefore not the preservation of a fixed appearance, but the capacity of a form to remain active through successive transformations. What persists is not symbolic content, but a set of underlying relationships that generate recognition and stability as circumstances change.

The Mythic as Pre-discursive Recognition

Within this framework, the mythic can be reconsidered as a pre-discursive mode of recognition embedded in material and perceptual experience. It emerges when formal configurations generate a sense of familiarity, inevitability, or coherence that precedes conceptual interpretation.

In this sense, mythic experience is not necessarily tied to specific symbolic meanings. It arises through a resonance between embodied perception and recurrent formal relationships, producing a pre-reflective familiarity that operates prior to discursive explanation. Recognition, however, is not limited to identification alone. Certain forms generate a heightened sense of presence, significance, or necessity that exceeds their immediate practical function. Such experiences do not eliminate cultural interpretation, but they suggest that some aspects of form may remain effective even when the symbolic systems through which they were originally understood have weakened or lost relevance. Viewed in this way, the mythic emerges at the intersection of material conditions, perceptual continuity, and embodied engagement.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the persistence of form emerges through the interaction of material conditions, perceptual continuity, and embodied engagement. Material conditions help explain why certain configurations remain viable; perceptual continuity clarifies why they remain intelligible; and operational memory helps explain how these configurations can be reproduced, adapted, and reactivated across changing circumstances. Together, these dimensions offer an alternative account of formal persistence that does not depend exclusively on the survival of symbolic systems.

From this perspective, forms persist because relationships between matter, perception, and action continue to generate coherent and viable arrangements. The recurrence of formal configurations across sculpture, architecture, and material culture is therefore not simply a consequence of cultural inheritance or processes of cultural transmission, but also of their capacity to respond effectively to recurring material constraints and perceptual tendencies. By introducing the concept of operational memory, this framework shifts attention away from form as a fixed representation and towards an ongoing process in which forms are repeatedly stabilised, transformed, and reactivated within new historical and cultural circumstances. In this way, it becomes possible to understand continuity as the reactivation of operative principles across different contexts of use, interpretation, and practice.

Ultimately, this persistence suggests that continuity is not located exclusively in symbols or traditions. It also emerges through enduring patterns of engagement with material environments and embodied modes of experience. In this sense, operational memory offers a way of understanding continuity as a process of reactivation rather than preservation. Forms

persist not because they remain identical, but because the conditions that sustain them can be repeatedly enacted, generating recognition and resonance across time.

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Material Culture and Marginality: The Loss of Mataram Characteristics in Ancient Gravestones at Tanggeran Village, Central Java (19th–20th Centuries)

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Islamic Mataram was a preeminent kingdom in Java since the 16th century. However, by the 19th century, the colonial policies of Daendels and the aftermath of the Java War triggered profound political instability. Dutch intervention through *Instituut voor de Javaansche taal* reframed Javanese culture into an elitist construct, systematically decoupling Islamic influence from Javanese tradition. This created a cultural segregation that stripped marginal communities of their access to the symbolic meanings of Javanese Islam heritage. This study utilizes (Shils & Shils, 1979) theoretical framework of "The Center and The Periphery." Theoretically, the potency of symbolic values diminishes as the geographical distance from the center of power increases. Employing the seven-stage methodology by (Ashmore & Sharer, 2010) comprising formulation, implementation, data collection, data processing, analysis, interpretation, and publication. The research focuses on gravestones in Tanggeran Village, Central Java, which is geopolitically as a marginal region, and compared to the central palace standard. Field findings reveal that 19th-century gravestones in Tanggeran Village still retained distinct Mataram characteristics. However, by the 20th century, this style faded, transitioning into significantly simpler forms. This phenomenon demonstrates a deterioration of cultural values within material culture, influenced by geographical distance, the weakening of the Palace's political control, and historical silencing by colonialism. Consequently, the local community has lost its collective memory regarding its cultural origins.

Keywords: Mataram Islam, Java, ancient tombstone

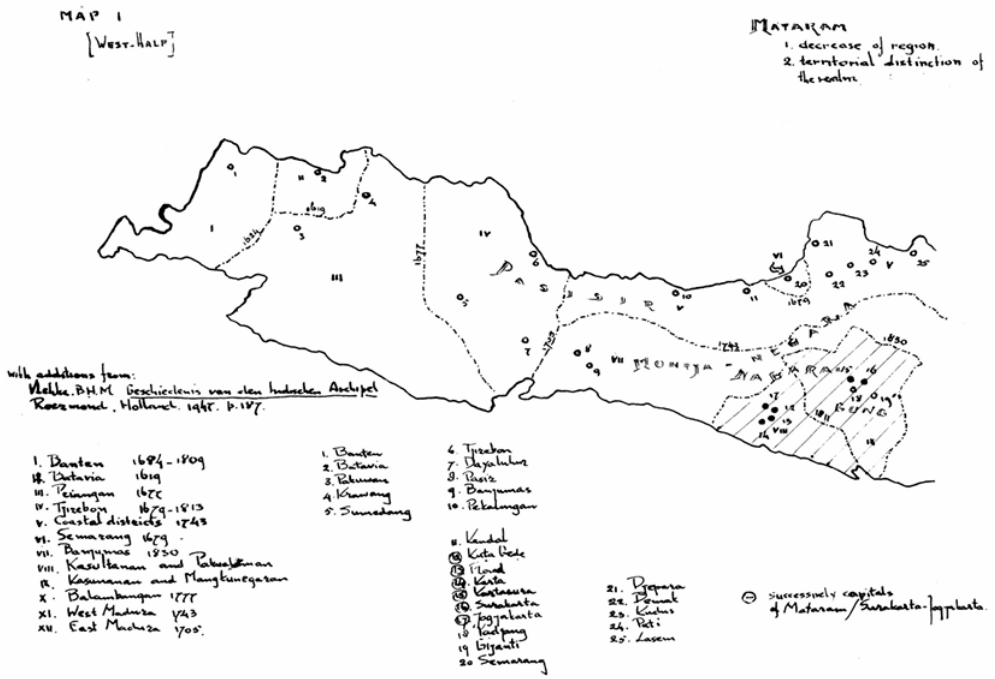
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Introduction

The arrival of Islam in the Java region was marked by the development of Islamic-style kingdoms that began to emerge on the coast of Java. Starting with the emergence of the Demak Kingdom led by Raden Patah, a son of Brawijaya. In the 16th century, to be precise, 1578, near Kali Opak and Kali Praga, the Mataram Kingdom was founded by Ki Ageng Pemanahan, where this area was actually still under Pajang's authority. The Giyanti war of 1775 resulted in the Giyanti Agreement which resulted in Mataram being split into the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate and the Surakarta (Solo) Kasunanan (Poesponegoro, 2008b).

The division of territory during the Mataram era was divided into several parts, namely *nagaragung* which was the core or central region of the Mataram kingdom, *mancanegara*, the region outside the core but still under central control. The *mancanegara* region was located around *nagaragung.* The coastal region was a small area that also bordered the sea (Handinoto, 2010). Some sources state that there was a *mancanegara* region as well as a coastal region. Another source states (Poesponegoro, 2008a), there was an area that was more core than *nagaragung,* namely *kutanegara* or *kutagara*, which was the area where the palace was located with more specific boundaries.

Figure 1
Sketch of the Distribution of the Central Java Region



Source: Bernard H.M. Vlekke (1947) in (Moertono, 1968)

In a sketch by Bernard H.M. Vlekke (1947), the Brebes region is depicted as a single unit with *Tjirebun.* This region was categorized as coastal from at least 1799 to 1833, along with Tegal and Losari, extending to the south coast. Meanwhile, the outermost region is depicted in Banyumas (Carey, 2014) and the core region, *Nagaragung*, is located in Yogyakarta and Surakarta.

Entering the 19th century, Napoleon sent his envoy to Batavia, Marshal Herman Willem Daendels to serve as Governor-General. The aim was to make Java a military base to face

England in the Indian Ocean. Daendels' arrival was the beginning of disaster for the Javanese people. Starting with the project to build the trans-Java postal road, using gunpowder to blow up mountains and open access through the Priangan Mountains, Puncak Pas, to Bandung. It didn't stop there, Daendels tried to centralize power in Batavia for all administrative matters of the Dutch East Indies, this made fundamental changes in the political structure and access in Java. Including relations with Javanese kings. The palace, especially Hadiningrat Ngayogyakarta, often felt humiliated by the policies issued by Daendels (Carey, 2014).

In archaeology, gravestones are viewed as material culture, not merely the product of human culture or thought. Therefore, gravestones are not merely tangible objects but rather something that holds meaning in various aspects of society. Studies related to gravestones in archaeology generally first identify their morphology. Gravestones are divided into four parts: the base, body, shoulders, and top (Sukendar, 1999).

Tanggeran Village is in the southern part of Brebes, precisely Tonjong District, Brebes Regency, Central Java. South Brebes or also called *Brebes Kidulan*, refers to the current Brebes Regency in the south with Bumiayu District as the center of community activities, especially in running the economy for the surrounding districts, including Tonjong District. The Brebes, Tegal and Losari regions used to be one unit, in 1678, Amangkurat II appointed the first Regent of Brebes and made the region stand autonomously (Iskandar, 2006). This also indicates that since its founding, Brebes Regency has been part of Mataram's authority.

Problems and Methodology

In the Tanggeran Village public cemetery, ancient gravestones are scattered, thought to date back to the 19th century. These are concentrated on the northeastern side, the highest point in the area. As a region once under Mataram rule, some of the ancient gravestones in Tanggeran Village share common characteristics that indicate Mataram characteristics. However, over time, Mataram-style gravestones have fallen out of use, both in their form and decoration. Local residents no longer know the origins or owners of the graves bearing Mataram symbols. This has led to a fading of cultural identity within the community, reflected in the ancient gravestones, particularly in Tanggeran Village. This research seeks to formulate and address the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Mataram gravestones in Tanggeran Village, Brebes, Central Java?
2. To what extent have the characteristics of Mataram gravestones in Tanggeran Village as archaeological objects faded?

The method used in compiling this research is based on systematic archaeological research methods. This research method consists of seven stages: formulation, implementation, data collection, data processing, analysis, interpretation, and publication (Ashmore & Sharer, 2010).

Formulation is the initial stage in this research. Research formulation is the stage of problem definition, feasibility study and background investigation. This stage is important to do because it is the initial stage which determines the objectives and main problems in the research. The next stage is implementation. At this stage, planning is carried out and all necessary arrangements are completed in the field. There are at least three main components that need to be considered at this stage, licensing, funding and logistics. There are two types of data collected at the data collection stage. First, primary data is the main data in research, which in this case is ancient tombstones as data objects for archaeological research. Secondary data in

this research are historical notes, literature studies, old maps, and previous research that can support primary data. The two main activities in carrying out data processing are processing archaeological data objects, which in this case are ancient tombstones and processing in making notes, writing or descriptions. The processing of archaeological data objects in this research is in the form of pictorial recording, namely recording that captures visuals. Photographs were taken using a camera of ancient tombstones in this research.

The analysis stage in archeology at least includes a classification based on certain variables that are needed. In this research, the classification carried out was the grouping of ancient tombstones based on their shape, decoration and existing symbols. This analysis can also be applied to cultural material as a whole, namely positional meaning is the meaning obtained through observing the relationship between one symbol and other symbols as a whole. In this analysis it must also be interpreted in relation to the context of the symbol towards its owner. In this case, Edward Shils' theory of Center and Periphery is assisted, which divides society into center and periphery. The central community here is defined as the center that holds and has control over cultural values. So you will see differences in patterns between central and peripheral communities as owners and producers of cultural materials. Interpretation is the result of analysis, which includes a collection of data collected and processed. Interpretation requires an understanding of the context and various model tests, including historical, cultural, and social aspects. Research publication is carried out as a form of researcher accountability for their research results.

Theory

Edward Shils (1975) “The Center and The Periphery”

A theory regarding social patterns in society, namely center and periphery (Shils & Shils, 1979). This theory states that symbolic value diminishes with increasing geographical distance from the center of power. In a societal structure, the central zone exerts influence on the broader community, within the ecological region in which they reside. The central zone here is not limited to a specific geographic area or scope, but rather serves as the center of the realm of values and beliefs. This center then regulates all forms of symbols, values, and beliefs within society. The center here is also sacred. Essentially, every society has its own official beliefs, and it is the center that regulates these, even when the community interprets or understands these beliefs in its own way.

There is a set of central values, namely the order that governs the way a society lives. These values govern many aspects of life, such as economic, social, political, kinship, and even cultural values. The center of power has an organization that holds authority over these values. This central organization holds authority and is elite in nature. Within the elite, they make decisions, consult with each other, discuss, and take the initiative in carrying out their duties. However, within the central system, there is a hierarchy that means some will have more power than others. However, their decisions must be based on the public interest in their actions, values, and the system as a whole.

One strategy in relations and politics is to have territory. To provide legitimacy, land or territory often becomes a profitable symbol. Apart from the resources contained therein, territory is a symbol of conquest of power. Territory is considered as something special which is also related to social status. This then makes a society have certain boundaries not only as regional boundaries, but also social boundaries. Those who live close to the central territorial area will

be considered to have more privilege than those who are far from the center. One example is sentiment towards public facilities and their communication access with the center. With easier access to the center, people who live close to the center will receive many benefits. However, they also have to be more obedient to the values issued by the center. Values in society: economic, political, social and cultural, will be more strictly applied.

For those who live far from the center of power, they will have the freedom to use less of the values of that center in some aspects. The distribution of values will be uneven, and those who live far from the center will experience vulnerability. Sometimes this arises from the central organization itself if it is too centrist. However, even as far as a democratic society is concerned, there will always be a small part of those who do not implement central values for various reasons. In the end, this is like a pattern, no matter how comprehensive the distribution of values, there will be those who apply and those who do not apply these values.

Ancient Tombstones in the Central Area of Mataram

The ancient gravestones in the central area of Mataram, Yogyakarta today, have their own characteristics. That one the tombstone issued during the Mataram period, Sultan Agung (1613–1645), is also called the Nisan Hanyakrakusuman (Yaser, 2023). The gravestones from this period have influences from Demak-Pasai. The general characteristic of this type is that it is flat with a taper at the bottom, the *mustaka* is *meru* or triangular in shape, some have decorative *tumpals* and tendrils or leaves. The Hanyakrakusuman tombstone has three evolutions in its decorative form. Firstly, the tombstone is tall and large, there is no *tumpal* decoration on the body of the tombstone, and there are no decorative cloud flower edges. Second, the tombstone is still tall and large, there are *tumpal* decorations on the body of the tombstone, and there are decorative cloud flower edges. Third, the size of the tombstone is smaller than the previous two stages, has a *tumpal* decoration on the body, and is decorated with cloud flower edges.

Ancient gravestones in the central Mataram region continued to evolve, particularly in their varied forms and decorative motifs. During the Hamengkubuwono I era (1755–1899), a typical gravestone typology centered in Yogyakarta, but this type also spread throughout Surakarta, the northern coast of Java, and parts of Central Java. Furthermore, this typology also includes subtypes such as Gunungkidulan gravestones, Pantura gravestones, Selobaran gravestones, and so on (Yaser, 2025). Most forms within this type retain their flat shape, with the exception of the g*ada* shape. Despite the visual diversity and the addition of decorative motifs, key characteristics that distinguish this type from the central Mataram region, in addition to its location, remain. This type is a continuation of the previous type, Hanyakrakusuman. In the Hanyakrakusuman type, the common decorative motif is the triangle or *tumpal*, the *mustaka* on this type still represents the *meru*, and some gravestones still feature cloud-blossom decorations on the edges. The common forms of the Hamengkubuwanan type are found throughout Yogyakarta, Central Java, and the surrounding areas.

Both the Hanyakrakusuman and Hamengkubuwanan types are products of ancient tombstone culture produced in the central region of the Mataram kingdom. Both types are continuous with each other, both in terms of time and in the development of their forms and decorative motifs. Despite their variations in form, the general morphology, along with their underlying meaning and philosophy, remains intact.

Results and Discussion

Tanggeran Village Public Cemetery, borders residents' plantations to the north, the Pedes River to the south, and rice fields to the east and west. This cemetery is still actively used by residents today. The discovery of ancient tombstones in this cemetery is quite massive with several variations in shape. There are finds of ancient tombstones in the Tanggeran Village Public Cemetery. Some of them have unique shapes and are slightly different when compared to the ancient tombstones found in the central areas of Mataram, Yogyakarta and Surakarta. At least 194 ancient tombstones were found consisting of various variations in shape and decoration.

It is known that in the morphological division of ancient tombstones, there are head, shoulders, body and feet (Sukendar, 1999). In the findings of ancient tombstones in Tanggeran Village, this morphological division appears to be as follows.

Figure 2
Morphological Classification of Ancient Gravestones



The head is the topmost part of the gravestone. This section features a variety of shapes, ranging from tapered, flat, and curved. Most ancient gravestones discovered have shoulders that connect directly to the head. The body typically features geometric lines or other decorative elements, and the foot is usually found joined directly to the body.

One of the easiest ways to classify cultural materials is by distinguishing their basic shapes. Ancient gravestones found in Tanggeran Village are classified based on differences in basic shape. The five basic shapes of ancient gravestones in Tanggeran Village are rounded, crowned, square, thin crown, and nodule. The rounded shape is based on the rounded head of the gravestone. This shape is known to be present in 69 of the gravestones found in the Tanggeran Village Public Cemetery. Furthermore, there is a square shape, with a flat head that merges with the body, giving the appearance of a square or rectangle. The square type was found in 15. The crown shape on ancient gravestones is easily recognized by the triangular or divided head shape into three as if forming a crown. This type of crown is 43. Another type that resembles a crown is the thin crown. This type is similar to a crown, only there are differences in the dimensions of length, width and thickness which are smaller. The thin crown type is 25. The last type is the nodule, in the form of an ancient gravestone with an irregular shape, usually made of andesite stone. This type is 42. It is known that the total number of ancient gravestones found in the Tanggeran Village Public Cemetery is 194.

Common decorative motifs found on ancient gravestones include geometric lines on the body, triangular shapes, anthropomorphic motifs, and other motifs such as lotus buds. Straight horizontal lines on the body of the gravestone are common at this site, usually consisting of two or three lines, interspersed with other motifs or simply plain. The use of horizontal lines

on the body of the gravestone has been apparent since the emergence of the Demak type (Ambary, 1984).

Anthropomorphic the concept of assigning human characteristics to non-human objects, such as inanimate objects, nature, plants, or animals (Guthrie, 2015). The concept of anthropomorphism is rooted in human awareness of spirituality. In a time when humans were still pre-religious, they tended to view something greater as part of themselves. Anthropomorphism is closely related to animism. Animism is defined as a belief that all things possess a spirit. Piaget proposed ideas related to animism, stating that animism emerged from simple societies. Although this society has advanced in thought, action, and technology, these animistic elements are difficult to completely eliminate. Animism is also a product of perception. States that animism is a perceptual strategy based on three levels. Perception is interpretation, which in turn produces meaning, which is then recognized at a broader level. Anthropomorphic phenomena arise from the search for meaning. When humans began to observe the world and see what appeared to be alive, this led to the attribution of human attributes to non-humans, a phenomenon known as anthropomorphism.

Figure 3
Anthropomorphic Gravestone



Variations of triangular shapes and ornamentation are also found on ancient gravestones. This shape is common on the body of the gravestone, while triangular elements are also found on the headstone, which resembles a crown. Triangular ornamentation is common in Javanese society, representing the *tumpal*, is a triangular ornament applied to various media such as buildings, textiles, and, in this case, ancient gravestones. *Tumpal* also represents *Mahameru* Mount, a sacred landscape in Hindu-Buddhist teachings. The summit of *Mahameru* is the abode of the Gods, and its slopes represent the lowest level of heaven (Poesponegoro, 2008a). The concept of the universe with *Mahameru* as its center seems to have persisted into later periods. In Islamic architecture, ancient Javanese mosques feature *tumpal* roofs, a representation of the *meru* concept (Pijper, 1947).

Another variety is the lotus flower bud. Lotus or also known as *padma* is a plant that is viewed with philosophy in classical teachings in Indonesia. There is a religious conception that the lotus is a plant that grows in water, like the Gods in classical teachings who do not touch the earth. Furthermore, the lotus is a sacred flower that served as Vishnu's seat when he first created the universe (Munandar, 2019).

Inscriptions on gravestones generally revolve around the identity of the deceased, such as name, date of birth and date of death, and for some beliefs and cultures the names of family members are also included. Apart from that, there are also poems, poems and quotations from the holy book. So far, ancient tombstones in Tanggeran Village have been found with inscriptions containing year numbers, most likely these are the year numbers of the time of death. This year's number inscription findings often found rounded type tombstones, with the date listed around the 20th century. Meanwhile for other types it was quite rare to find identification and the inscriptions only had decorative variations.

In the 19th century, the political condition of the palace was unstable, until the Java War culminated. The war was sparked by Prince Diponegoro's anger at the actions of the Dutch and the duke who conspired over a road project that put stakes on the prince's land. This really tarnished his dignity. The Java War lasted from 1825 to 1830. It ended with the prince being arrested and exiled to several places, before finally being placed in Makassar until the end of his life (Carey, 2014). After the Java War, the political order in Java was largely controlled by the Dutch which involved many aspects, including socio-cultural. The Dutch established an institution whose special task was to study the language which was inseparable from Javanese culture, based in Surakarta. This institution is *Institute for Javaansche Taal* and later became *Javanologi* which is a center for Javanese studies in Leiden with large funds and adequate methods (Shiraishi, 1990). This has the effect that anyone who wants to study Javanese culture, including the Javanese themselves, must at least read Dutch language works or come to the Netherlands. The substance he studied came from Surakarta, which gave kasunanan legitimacy for Javanese culture. In practice, Dutch *Javanology* not only manipulated ancient Javanese traditions, but also separated Islam as something opposed. As a result, many ordinary Javanese Muslim people cannot read their own cultural traditions and symbols (Yaser, 2023).

Judging from the ancient tombstones in the central area of power, the ancient tombstones in Tanggeran Village are quite simple. Some of the philosophies of shape and variety found on ancient tombstones in the central area are also found on ancient tombstones in Tanggeran Village. Although not as rich as what is found on tombstones in the central area. The philosophy of shape and variety found on tombstones in the central region include *tumpal, wulan tumanggal, purnama sidi, kembang awan, kemada* or *kembang patran, wajik* or *kembang patran, lung-lungan, kembang paku tanduk rusa, kembang manggis* or *kembang tunjung, padma, bawang sebungkul, kembang waru, kembang cengkih, kembang pepe, kembang melati, ulat,* and *Muhammad Salira* (Yaser, 2023).

Conclusion

The characteristics of the ancient tombstones in Tanggeran Village have their own characteristics which are different from the ancient tombstones in the central area of Mataram. The ancient gravestones found have a simpler shape, with decoration dominated by geometric patterns. Apart from that, pre-Islamic traces are also found even in the form of animist culture. Meanwhile, traces of the characteristics of ancient Mataram tombstones in Tanggeran Village are reflected in the *tumpal* pattern which is a representation of Mahameru Mount. Even though this is included in the pre-Islamic tradition, the use of this variety was still carried out until the Hamengkubuwanan type (1755–1899).

The ancient gravestones in Tanggeran Village experienced some fading when they entered the 20th century, with indications of simplifying the basic shape towards a rounded type, as well as the use of simple decoration. In this type, it is clear that there are year numbers that indicate

the 20th century. If you look at the situation at that time, there are several geo-political factors behind it. Political conditions since entering the 19th century were unstable, especially due to Dutch interference in the palace order. This influences socio-cultural policies and how people view their own culture. Apart from that, there is a geographical factor in the form of Tanggeran Village being in a marginal area which is quite far from the center of the Palace, so that the cultural control in Tanggeran Village is not as strong as that in the center.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are dedicated to the Village Head and all levels of Tanggeran Village officials, who have given official research permission, provided open access, and provided enormous technical assistance while the author was conducting field observation activities. Full support from village officials played a vital role in the smooth inventory of ancient tombstone artifacts which constituted the largest concentration of samples in this research. This research also was conducted under the RIIM Program's Strategic Invitation Platform entitled “Exploration of Civilization in the Bumiayu Region and the North Serayu Mountains,” issued by the Deputy for Research and Innovation Facilitation of BRIN through Decree No. 47/II.7/HK/2024.

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Descriptive Mundanities and Scale in the Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The rise of the modern novel marked a shift away from description in favor of narrative elements such as the plot. The paradigm shift, while crucial, undermined the critical role description plays in construction of the novel. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006)—an often popular text for postcolonial discourse, has enjoyed underwhelming attention in terms of narratological practices. Hence, this paper examines the relationship between the mundane descriptions and scale to illuminate the novel's exploration of the local class divide and global diasporic aspirations. It uses the descriptive practices that provide narrative space to the character of the Cook, and his son Biju, an undocumented migrant in New York– to regulate and exhibit the scale of their physical and social boundaries. The analysis applies Dora Zhang's theory of description's unassuming political power of foregrounding literary fragments over the text as a whole. The paper also employs close reading strategies (like Erich Auerbach's) to relationally connect the microscale (descriptions of everyday life) and the macroscale (socio-postcolonial framework). This paper, using these narratological frameworks, argues that mundane descriptions in *The Inheritance of Loss*, help negotiate the novel's social and spatial scale by moving between the local and the global. It also ambitiously purports that the narratives of the marginalised can be illuminated through marginalised narratological elements like description.

Keywords: narratology, Kiran Desai, description, postcolonialism, mundanity

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Introduction

Kiran Desai, in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2008), tackles many forms of generational trauma, grief and violence– personal and of a nation's– through the perspectives of four pivotal characters and their intermeshed lives. Set in the 1980s in Kalimpong, India, where Sai, an orphaned teenage girl lives with her grandfather, Jemubhai Patel, a retired judge embittered by his British education and lost status. They live with a frail, old Cook whose son Biju is an undocumented immigrant struggling to survive in New York. The novel unfolds against the backdrop of political unrest in the region, while exploring the characters' intimate tragedies through the lens of class, culture and identity. These social issues compounded by postcolonial, diasporic and global concerns manifest in the novel, not only at the macro scale of the nation, but also– possibly primarily– through the quotidian lives of the main characters.

In these mundane moments, description takes over the "action of narration" to build a narrative which is simultaneously granular/microlevel and universal/macrolevel– in essence, these descriptions of mundanity make possible a narrative glocalisation, if you may. Dora Zhang writes: "The ineliminable threat of arbitrariness and excess in any description…these could be read not as symptoms of total reification but rather as challenges to teleology and instrumentality" (p. 17). She also mentions how, contrastingly, novel theory tends to "work at the macroscales" (Zhang, 2020, p. 11). The paper utilises this formulation of description's marginality and the grandiose of narratives to analyse mundanity's relationship to narration. More pointedly, it seeks to explore how mundanity in the novel's descriptive passages negotiates the scale of the novel by constantly moving between the local and the global of the narrative.

The Micro and the Macro of the Mundane

In a scene set in the kitchen of the house, we are introduced to the cook.

> Here, at the back, inside the cavernous kitchen, was the cook, trying to light the damp wood. He fingered the kindling gingerly for fear of the community of scorpions living, loving, reproducing in the pile. Once he'd found a mother, plump with poison, fourteen babies on her back. Eventually, the fire caught and he placed his kettle on top, as battered, as encrusted as something dug up by an archeological team, and waited for it to boil. The walls were singed and sodden, garlic hung by muddy stems from the charred beams, thickets of soot clumped batlike upon the ceiling. The flame cast a mosaic of shiny orange across the cook's face, and his top half grew hot, but a mean gust tortured his arthritic knees. (Desai, 2008, p. 1)

Visually or rather, focally, Desai's description forces us to look at the mundane. Like any everyday act, cooking takes place in the space of the kitchen, by an individual whose occupation is to cook– the action of the scene is perceptively simple. It is the minute observation, however, of the damp wood, the encrusted kettle, soot-clumped ceiling, further amplified by colour gradients (charred, shiny orange), textural alliteration (singed and sodden) and atmospheric coldness that produce the effect necessary for the readers to understand this narrative world. Monica Fludernik (2009) calls "the story level" the level that "has a combination of setting and actants" (p. 29). She suggests that it is through the interaction of the setting and the actants that the narrative is rendered dynamic. However, one can observe that the mere presence of the objects in their dilapidated states has already led to the creation of a dynamism by description, at the microscale. In description, dynamism can be achieved through

affect, varied temporal scales (human, ecological etc.) or even linguistically through adverbs (Zhang, 2020, pp. 14–5). In the aforementioned paragraph, the mundane invites the reader, then, not deliberately but subliminally, to linger around the descriptive verbs and their implications of class, status quo and submission. Zhang claims that "on a microlevel, almost all language—including verbs of action—has 'descriptive resonance'" (p. 60). The existence of the cook's arthritic knees is a sufficient symptom of the various socio-psychological underpinnings of his positionality in the novel. It's descriptive dynamism precedes the act of torture (by the cold wind), and it is by the virtue of descriptive mundanity that this detail holds its place in the narrative.

Simultaneously, one observes that the mundane continues to associate the granular to the macroscale. In a relatively recently postcolonial India, the wretched conditions of a supposedly stately bungalow of a former Judge Jemubhai Patel, who studied law in England, ties the mundane to the overarching postcolonial narrative of a nation coping with a violent loss of identity and struggling to forge a new one in its aftermath; tussling with a constant "interrogation of its neocolonial present" (Vishwamohan, 2011, p. 261).

In another scene, two young Gorkha militants who forcibly enter Cho Oyu, inspect their surroundings as they wait for Sai to make them tea:

> Their noses wrinkled from the gamy mouse stench of a small place, although the ceiling had the reach of a public monument and the rooms were spacious in the old manner of wealth, windows placed for snow views. They peered at a certificate issued by Cambridge University that had almost vanished into an overlay of brown stains blooming upon walls that had swelled with moisture and billowed forth like sails. (Desai, 208, pp. 13–4)

Here, the juxtaposition of what Ranciere describes as "microsensory events"— of smelling the stench, noticing the colonials and then looking at the decaying degree in simultaneity– acts carried out from the positionality of a violating invader– signals the class conflict implicit in the political undercurrents of the the state as well as the ensuing separatist Gorkhaland movement. It goes back to Zhang's idea of how "the action at hand is just the labor of perception, which is the 'story' these descriptions narrate" (Zhang, 2020, p. 12). While the violating act of intrusion is an indicator of the worsening effects of the separatist movement, it is the mundane act of observation described in the passage that truly illuminates the hauntings of a colonial past in the deterioration of the Judge's degree, the class consciousness exhibited by young Gorkha boys through their expectations of the house and the palpable power struggle that ensues in the area– which makes this dynamic shift possible in the first place. Both these passages exhibit Erich Auerbach's (1953) concept of "interior time" where the physical action of intrusion or cooking occupy brief temporal space– or "exterior time"– but the lengthy, observable descriptions represent a "naturalistic rendering of those processes in their peculiar freedom, which is neither restrained by a purpose nor directed by a specific subject of thought" (p. 538). It condenses space and time in a way which makes negotiations of narrative scales possible. Zhang (2020) notes that description functions as a "textual cyst"; a "minor, foreign body" within the narrative "which always aspires to take over the host" (p. 3). Through mundanity, description develops a dual function where it is able to maintain its status as a localised cyst and concurrently, grow out towards the macro or global scale of narration. This is possible due to description's tendencies for privileging parts over whole, engendering a multiplicity which allows for this simultaneity of being.

The novel's narrative core is imbued and layered with multiplicity. Fludernik (2009) discusses the concept of "plot strands" in narratives, introduced initially in the fairy tale genre, which are characterised as "structure of linear sequences of action" (p. 30). They work towards a cohesive resolution in the end and require a merger. Desai complicates this model with an almost rhizomatic approach towards plot strands. She carves out multiple plot strands for every character, each problematised by overlapping thematic concerns. Vishwamohan (2011), in *Home, Immigration, and Fractured Identities,* writes of this plural tendency of Desai's novel and the South Asian novel, in general:

> that South Asian reality tends to be anarchic and defy centralization…South Asia is uniquely placed in a maze of marginalities and it is futile to force it to conform to a monolithic identity-religious, linguistic, or even administrative'… Desai's voice is fierce as she warns that fixation with monolithic ideals and cultural and national purity, while turning a blind eye to plurality, will finally lead toward disharmony and conflict. (p. 271)

The Judge and Sai both experience the void of familial and stature loss, but Jemubhai's colonial promise of education as a means for better life is paralleled not with vivid similarity in Biju's journey as an undocumented migrant in New York. Conversely, the cook's subordination as a function of his class is somewhat mimicked by Sai in her gendered meekness reflected in her inability to openly defy her patriarchal grandfather. Therefore, through mundanity and description, plot strands in the novel converge, diverge, braid and run parallel to ensure a multiplicity which resists wholeness. This decentralised, democratic narrative model creates what Auerbach calls a "multipersonal representation of consciousness" where objective reality is regulated by various subjective impressions which resists the governing authority of a unipersonal narrator.

In another excerpt from the novel, Sai and the Cook pore over an inflatable *National Geographic* globe, tracing various landscapes as Sai points out Biju's New York to the cook and explains the time difference– as she learnt it through her previous convent education. The Cook notes this phenomenon as a "funny back-to-front fact that didn't seem mirrored by any other circumstance involving the two nations" (Desai, 2008, p. 20). A descriptive passage rooted in mundanity, it reflects a multiplicity of identities, cultures and thoughts. It contrasts Sai's colonial literacy in the English language against the Cook's illiteracy but simultaneously, illuminates his worldly sense of understanding power imbalances. Additionally, while Sai harbors more epistemic knowledge of this world, it is the Cook who's more closely navigating the reality of the world order through his immigrant son. Mundanity aids the co-existence of these multiplicities of being and produces an environment conducive to highlighting "the more elementary things which all our lives have in common" (Auerbach, 1953). Zhang reverberates similar notions when talking about merits of description as a method:

> Description constitutes a troublesome kind of part, a fragment that always needs to be subordinated to other ends in order to neutralize its threat of disintegrating the whole…The specter of its autonomy challenges the unity and integrity of the work as a whole. (p. 3)

Thus, Desai's novel is continually fractured, multiple but almost never whole.

The Marginality of the Mundane

The mundane functions at the political margins, just like description manifests itself in narratological margins. Any effort of mainstreaming their efficacy or totalising their experience makes them less impactful. Barbara Johnson (2014) notes how Auerbach's formulations of "minor, unimpressive, events" in Woolf's *The Brown Stocking,* such as "measuring a stocking, conversing with the maid, answering the phone– can all be identified as conventional women's activities" (p. 118). Similarly, Zhang (2020) points to the work done by description as "a profound shift toward the democratization of experience where what is lost is not all sense of human action and significance but instead only one particular understanding of action and one particular way of 'linking action and significance'" (p. 5). That which is female, subaltern, outcast– resistant in any way to the dominant modes of being, finds its place in the narrative within the framework of mundanity and description. It is the marginal tendencies of the mundane and descriptive, then, that makes itself so evident in the novel– especially in instances where characters are rendered powerless by implications of their class, culture or sense of belonging.

We encounter Biju, the Cook's son, as a fully fledged character for the first time when Sai notices his picture in the Cook's quarters. In the picture, she noted that

> Biju did not look fearless but appeared frozen, like his parents. He stood between props of a tape player and a Campa Cola bottle, against a painted backdrop of a lake, and on the sides, beyond the painted screen, were brown fields and slivers of the neighbors, an arm and a toe, hair and a grin, a chicken tail frill… (Desai, 2008, p. 16)

In the novel, Biju's inbetweenness: between two nations, the urban and the rural, poverty's limitations and immigration's instability colludes to erase his personhood altogether. His diasporic position signals "the ways in which postcolonial subjects and economic migrants feel marginalized in the Global North" (Sabo, 2012, p. 377). However, Biju's image, sustained temporally through description, humanizes his existence and roots him in reality. He is no longer a diasporic statistic but a real person, dissolving his immigrant status. Zhang (2020) theorises that "The equality of literary democracy is limited to capacities for feeling, breaking down the division between 'life doomed to utility' and 'existences destined for the grandeurs of action and passion'" (p. 7). This mundane act of describing his photograph in a rural setting in India, affords him, and his marginality, narrative space, power and agency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that Desai's persistent focus on the mundane and the descriptive redefines the nature of its narration through deliberate fracturing, multiplying and subverting of dominant narratives. Zhang (2020) writes that "attending to description makes us rethink the signal categories of novelistic form" (p. 8) and it is precisely this practice in Desai's novel that connects grand and abstract narratives of colonialism, globalization, and identity to the lived experiences of individuals, negotiated quietly within the details of a quotidian existence—in observing a stained university certificate, disfigured kettles, or a photograph. By consistently disintegrating the whole and privileging the part, *The Inheritance of Loss* makes a profound claim: that immense loss is at once historical and immediate– constantly traversing between local and global scales of human experience.

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Navigating Cities Through Play: A Study of Geo AR Induced Urban Flânerie During the Pikmin Bloom Tour in Kaohsiung

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study examines whether geolocation-based augmented reality (Geo AR) gameplay can encourage urban flânerie, cultural landscape perception, and initial place connection in a cultural walking event. Using Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung as a case study, the research analyzes a non-linear walking event that placed 12 Special Spots across urban areas of Kaohsiung and allowed players to arrange their own routes. This study adopts a questionnaire-based research design supported by an exploratory field study, with data collected through on-site participant observation, short interviews, and open-ended survey responses. The survey collected 171 valid responses, among which 87 participants provided open-ended responses. The findings indicate that most participants joined the event mainly to collect Pikmin while also using it as an opportunity to visit Kaohsiung. Participants noticed harbor landscapes, markets, streets, and event installations, and some extended the activity into nearby consumption, photo-taking, wandering, or additional visits. Thematic analysis shows that frequently mentioned themes included urban and cultural landscape perception, exploratory movement, and place meaning or initial connection. Descriptive results show high agreement with visiting unfamiliar places (M = 4.39), walking into unplanned streets or alleys (M = 4.36), and paying attention to both the game screen and real streets (M = 4.38). These findings suggest that walking-based Geo AR mechanics can transform physical movement into digitally guided urban flânerie, allowing the activity area to be experienced as a meaningful urban space perceived through movement, observation, and attention switching.

Keywords: geolocation-based augmented reality (Geo AR), Pikmin Bloom, urban flânerie, initial place connection

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Introduction

With the widespread use of smartphones, global positioning systems, mobile networks, and augmented reality technologies, geolocation-based augmented reality games (Geo AR games) have become an important medium connecting digital gameplay experiences with real urban spaces. Unlike conventional digital games, which mostly take place on screens or within virtual environments, Geo AR games require players to move physically, arrive at specific locations, or interact with their surroundings in order to progress through gameplay (Huang, 2017). As a result, gameplay is no longer limited to digital interfaces, but becomes connected with bodily movement, urban routes, streetscapes, and local environments. In this context, the city is transformed into a hybrid space in which digital missions and real-world environments are intertwined (Tsao, 2020).

Previous discussions of Geo AR games have mostly focused on representative cases such as *Pokémon GO*, often emphasizing competition, challenge, collection, social interaction, physical activity, or continuance intention (e.g., Chu, 2017; Oleksy & Wnuk, 2017). These studies help explain how location-based games change player behavior, but they also tend to place Geo AR game research within frameworks of game participation, motivation, and behavioral intention. In contrast, Geo AR games centered on walking, daily records, companionship, and low-pressure collection have been less frequently discussed in relation to urban flânerie, cultural landscape perception, and place experience. Moreover, AR walking games do not necessarily lead directly to urban flânerie. Players may enter the city because of game missions, but their attention may still remain on smartphone screens, map spots, and game symbols, causing physical places to be simplified as task backgrounds or coordinates (Park, 2025). Therefore, how Geo AR games move from guiding walking to facilitating place observation, cultural landscape perception, and initial place connection remains a question requiring further investigation.

Pikmin Bloom offers a case distinct from competition-oriented Geo AR games. Unlike location-based games that require frequent navigation to points of interest or real-time responses to missions, *Pikmin Bloom* allows players to progress through walking, flower planting, collecting, character companionship, and retrospective review. Laato et al. (2022) describe *Pikmin Bloom* as a gamified walking experience that enhances everyday walking while avoiding excessive interference with users' daily lives. However, when this low-interruption and everyday form of Geo AR gameplay is placed within the context of a local tourism or cultural event, its spatial experience may change.

Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung provides a useful case for examining this change. The event was held in Kaohsiung on October 11 and 12, 2025. It was the first physical Pikmin Bloom Tour event in Taiwan and was organized in collaboration with the Tourism Bureau of Kaohsiung City Government. As a free physical walking event, participants used the *Pikmin Bloom* mobile application to complete in-game missions, visit 12 Special Spots on the event map, and collect event rewards. A key feature of the event was its non-linear route design: participants did not have to complete missions in a fixed order, but could freely arrange the order of visits and walking routes according to their location, time, interests, and pace of movement.

This event context transforms *Pikmin Bloom* from everyday gamified walking into a cultural walking event with implications for local tourism and urban exploration. Players were not only completing digital missions; they were also guided by Special Spots and route

arrangements into urban districts, alleys, and local landscapes such as harbor areas, markets, streets, and event installations. From this perspective, the Special Spots designed for the *Pikmin Bloom* Tour may supplement the relatively weak spatial navigation motivation in everyday gameplay, allowing players to move beyond low-interruption movement records and enter a more purposeful and place-sensitive process of urban flânerie. Although this study does not claim that a short-term event can form stable place attachment, it assumes that participants may develop preliminary place perception and emotional connection with the activity area through mission completion, landscape observation, and movement experience.

Based on this background, this study uses Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung as a case study to examine the role of walking-based Geo AR gameplay in urban exploration within a cultural event. Specifically, the study has three objectives. First, it explores how Geo AR missions guide participants' urban walking and exploration. Second, it analyzes whether participants experienced digital flânerie, physical-virtual attention switching, and cultural landscape perception during the event. Third, it discusses how urban flânerie guided by digital missions may contribute to participants' initial place connection with the activity area.

Literature Review

This literature review is organized around three key concepts: Geo AR games, urban flânerie, and initial place connection. These concepts provide the theoretical foundation for examining how walking-based Geo AR gameplay may guide participants' movement, perception, and preliminary connection with the activity area.

Geo AR Games

Geolocation-based augmented reality games (Geo AR games) refer to a form of mobile gameplay that combines geolocation, augmented reality, and mobile gaming. According to Liu (2022), Geo AR mobile games can be understood as the integration of three elements: geolocation, augmented reality, and mobile gameplay. Geolocation connects game content to real-world locations; augmented reality links digital content with the physical world; and mobile gameplay enables players to interact through smartphones and bodily movement. Tsao (2020) further notes that Geo AR games operate through location-aware technologies, such as GPS, digital map data, and sensors embedded in mobile devices. Unlike conventional online games, which mostly take place on screens or within virtual environments, Geo AR games require players to walk in the real world while using mobile applications to view virtual content connected to physical environments (Huang, 2017).

Therefore, the core feature of Geo AR games lies in their ability to connect digital missions, bodily movement, and real urban space. Players' experiences no longer occur only within digital interfaces, but extend into public spaces through walking, positioning, route choices, and interaction with their surroundings. In this context, the city becomes a hybrid space in which digital information, bodily action, and physical environments are intertwined (Tsao, 2020). Previous studies on Geo AR games have mainly focused on games with competitive or real-time interactive features, such as *Pokémon GO* and *Ingress*, and have examined issues such as player motivation, social interaction, physical activity, and place attachment (Chu, 2017; Laato et al., 2022; Oleksy & Wnuk, 2017). In contrast, *Pikmin Bloom* centers on walking, flower planting, collecting, character companionship, and daily records. Its low-interruption and walking-oriented features make it particularly suitable for examining how

non-competitive Geo AR games may guide players into urban space and generate exploration, observation, and place perception in the context of cultural activities.

Urban Flânerie

The concept of urban flânerie originates from discussions of nineteenth-century modern urban experience. The traditional flâneur is commonly understood as a modern urban wanderer who strolls through the city, observes urban life, and experiences the street through walking and looking (Baudelaire, 1863; Benjamin, 1999). Therefore, flânerie is not merely aimless walking, but a way of perceiving, understanding, and interpreting the city through bodily movement, visual attention, and incidental encounters.

With the widespread use of smartphones, digital maps, and location-based services, the figure of the flâneur has gradually shifted toward the post-flâneur. The post-flâneur no longer observes the city only through direct visual perception, but also records, shares, and reinterprets urban experience through smartphones and location-based applications (Argin et al., 2020). In this context, the smartphone is not simply a device that distracts users from their surroundings, but a medium that reorganizes the visual relationship between people and streets. The walker's attention may shift among the mobile screen, digital maps, image records, and physical streets, giving urban experience a hybrid physical-virtual character.

When location-based services are combined with augmented reality games, the flâneur further enters hybrid space. Geo AR players may be understood as digital flâneurs guided by digital missions. On the one hand, they follow maps, mission points, symbols, and rewards on the mobile screen; on the other hand, they must also move through the physical city, identify directions, choose routes, and observe their surroundings. Pereira da Cunha (2018), using *Pokémon GO* as an example, proposes the concept of the hybrid flâneur, arguing that players search for virtual clues through the game interface while walking through the physical city, thereby recognizing and re-signifying urban public space. In this study, digital flânerie refers to a form of urban walking guided by digital missions, in which players experience exploratory movement, physical-virtual attention switching, sensory recording, and place meaning generation.

Initial Place Connection

Place studies suggest that place is not merely a physical space, but a meaningful space shaped by human experience, memory, emotion, and interpretation (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). When people assign value, emotion, or attachment to a space, that space may be transformed from a simple location into a meaningful place (Tuan, 1977; Williams & Vaske, 2003). Therefore, urban space is not only a background in which activities take place, but may gradually acquire place meaning through people's movement, stopping, interaction, and perception.

Place attachment is commonly used to describe the emotional and functional bond between people and places. Previous studies have suggested that place attachment develops through direct contact, use experience, and interaction between people and places (Lewicka, 2011; Low & Altman, 1992; Perkins & Long, 2002). In the context of Geo AR games, gameplay experience may also influence how players perceive physical locations. Oleksy and Wnuk (2017), in their study of *Pokémon GO*, found that satisfaction with location-based AR gameplay and social interaction positively predicted players' place attachment to the locations where they played. However, place attachment is often understood as a relatively

stable relationship that develops through long-term contact, repeated visits, and accumulated experience.

For a one-time or short-term cultural walking event, it may be an overstatement to claim that participants have already developed stable place attachment. Therefore, this study adopts the more cautious concept of initial place connection to refer to participants' place perception, emotional response, and preliminary meaning-making toward the activity area generated through Geo AR-guided walking and digital flânerie. In the context of Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung, participants may initially join the event to collect Pikmin or complete event badges. However, through walking, stopping, photographing, detouring, and encountering local landscapes, the activity area may gradually be transformed from a background for game missions into a meaningful urban space associated with cultural atmosphere, urban characteristics, and personal memory.

Methodology

This study adopted a questionnaire-based research design supported by an exploratory field study. Using Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung as a case study, the research examined how a walking-based Geo AR game guided participants' urban exploration and contributed to experiences of digital flânerie and initial place connection within the Kaohsiung event area.

The research process consisted of two main stages. First, an exploratory field study was conducted during the event through on-site participation, field observations, and short interviews with participants. This stage aimed to understand participants' activity experiences, including their motivations for joining the event, movement patterns, observations of the surrounding environment, and extended exploration behaviors. The exploratory findings were used to support the design of the questionnaire and to provide contextual understanding for interpreting the survey results.

Second, an online questionnaire survey was conducted with participants who had taken part in Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung. The questionnaire was distributed through Facebook groups, LINE communities, and Threads. The questionnaire items were developed based on the theoretical concepts discussed in the literature review and adjusted to the context of the Pikmin Bloom Tour event. The survey included four main parts: digital flânerie, initial place connection, activity behavior, and background information. Digital flânerie focused on exploratory movement, physical-virtual attention switching, cultural landscape perception, and place meaning formation. Initial place connection examined participants' place-related feelings and emotional responses toward the Kaohsiung event area. Activity behavior included route choice, visits to Special Spots, stopping, photographing, and other exploration-related behaviors.

A total of 171 valid questionnaire responses were collected, among which 87 respondents provided open-ended answers. For data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to present participants' overall tendencies in the digital flânerie items. In addition, thematic coding was applied to the open-ended responses to identify recurring themes related to urban and cultural landscape perception, exploratory movement, place meaning, game missions, physical-virtual interaction, and extended activities. By combining quantitative survey results with qualitative responses, this study analyzes how a *Pikmin Bloom* collaborative city event transformed game missions into walking-based urban exploration and encouraged participants to observe, interpret, and initially connect with the Kaohsiung event area.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are mainly derived from exploratory field interviews, open-ended questionnaire responses, and descriptive statistics of the digital flânerie items. The findings show that Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung, as a Geo AR city walking event, not only attracted players through game missions and limited-time rewards, but also guided participants to walk, observe, and extend their exploration within the Kaohsiung event area through Special Spots and a non-linear route design.

The exploratory short interviews showed that most participants joined the event mainly for game-related purposes, such as collecting limited Pikmin, completing event missions, or obtaining event badges. However, during the actual participation process, players did not focus only on the game missions themselves. They also noticed elements of the surrounding urban environment while walking, including harbor landscapes, markets, streets, and event installations. Some participants further extended the activity into broader urban actions, such as local consumption, photography, wandering, or visiting other attractions in Kaohsiung. These findings show that although game missions served as an important motivation for participation, the bodily movement guided by these missions also encouraged participants to interact with the physical urban environment.

The open-ended questionnaire responses further supported this tendency. Among the 87 open-ended responses, the most frequently mentioned theme was “urban/cultural landscape perception,” with 46 mentions, accounting for 52.9%. This was followed by “exploratory movement,” with 43 mentions, accounting for 49.4%. In addition, “place meaning/initial connection” appeared 33 times, accounting for 37.9%; “game missions/rewards” appeared 25 times, accounting for 28.7%; “physical-virtual interaction” appeared 13 times, accounting for 14.9%; and “extended activities” appeared 11 times, accounting for 12.6%. Since one respondent’s answer could be coded into multiple themes, the percentages do not add up to 100%. These results show that participants’ activity experiences were not limited to game rewards or mission completion, but were also clearly related to urban landscapes, cultural environments, route exploration, and place-related feelings.

The descriptive statistics of the digital flânerie items also showed a relatively high level of agreement. The digital flânerie scale showed good internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .873. The item “visited unfamiliar places” received a mean score of 4.39, while “walked into unplanned streets or alleys” received a mean score of 4.36. These results suggest that participants tended to experience exploratory movement through the event missions. This finding echoes Rashid and Ara’s (2026) discussion of tactical detour: when players move between digital cues and the physical city, they may not simply pursue the shortest or most efficient route, but may instead produce detours, wandering, and exploration between mission points. In this study, the non-linear route design of Pikmin Bloom *Tour* allowed participants to decide the order in which they visited Special Spots and to enter unplanned streets, alleys, or nearby places during the activity. This indicates a form of urban flânerie guided by digital missions while still retaining participants’ autonomy.

In addition, the item “paid attention to both the game screen and real streets” received a mean score of 4.38, indicating that participants were not simply looking at the mobile screen during the activity, but were shifting their attention between digital missions and physical streetscapes. This finding echoes Argin et al.’s (2020) discussion of the post-flâneur. The post-flâneur is not completely absorbed by the smartphone screen in public space, but instead

distributes visual attention between the mobile device and the surrounding environment. In the context of this study, *Pikmin Bloom* players can be understood as digital flâneurs. On the one hand, they followed game cues to move toward Special Spots; on the other hand, they also observed streetscapes, buildings, shops, harbor views, and cultural landscapes during the walk. Digital cues did not separate players from the environment, but may instead have become a medium for looking at the city anew.

Taken together, these findings can be further discussed from the perspectives of Geo AR gameplay, digital flânerie, and initial place connection. First, digital missions did not replace participants' physical experience of the city. Rather, they functioned as cues and guidance that redirected participants' attention back to the urban environment. This echoes the view that Geo AR games connect digital content, real-world movement, and physical environments, and also suggests that the city became a hybrid space in which game missions and physical environments were intertwined. In the context of mobile media and Geo AR, urban flânerie is no longer only aimless wandering, but is also shaped by digital cues, mission objectives, and the physical event area. Participants followed game cues to visit Special Spots, while also choosing routes and adjusting their movement between different locations. Therefore, the design of Special Spots and non-linear routes transformed the Kaohsiung event area from a background for game missions into an urban space that could be walked through, observed, and rediscovered.

Finally, the open-ended responses related to place meaning and initial connection suggest that walking-based Geo AR gameplay may contribute to participants' early emotional and cognitive connection with the event area. Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) both point out that place is not merely a physical space, but is formed through human experience, perception, and the assignment of meaning. Low and Altman (1992), as well as Williams and Vaske (2003), further explain that place attachment is related to people's emotions, identity, and use experiences associated with place. Although place attachment is often understood as developing gradually through repeated contact and long-term experience, the findings of this study suggest that short-term, activity-based encounters may also evoke initial place-related feelings. Through walking, stopping, photographing, and noticing local details, participants were able to assign new meanings to the Kaohsiung event area. Therefore, Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung shows how a Geo AR city walking event can transform game participation into a situated experience of urban and cultural landscape perception.

Overall, the findings indicate that walking-based Geo AR games can serve as a medium for urban exploration within the context of city tourism and cultural activities. Through Special Spots, non-linear routes, and game rewards, *Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung* guided participants to move, observe, and stay within the Kaohsiung event area, thereby facilitating digital flânerie and initial place connection. This also suggests that the impact of Geo AR city walking events lies not only in enhancing game participation, but also in potentially reorganizing how participants interact with urban cultural spaces.

Table 1
Themes Mentioned in Open-Ended Responses

Theme	Mentions	Percentage
Urban / Cultural Landscape Perception	46	52.9%
Exploratory Movement	43	49.4%
Place Meaning / Initial Connection	33	37.9%
Game Missions / Rewards	25	28.7%
Physical-Virtual Interaction	13	14.9%
Extended Activities	11	12.6%

Note. Valid questionnaire responses: N = 171; open-ended respondents: n = 87. One respondent's answer could be coded into multiple themes; therefore, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Digital Flânerie Items

Item	Description	Mean	SD	N
FL1	Walked into streets or alleys that were not originally planned to complete the event missions.	4.36	0.905	171
FL2	Visited places that I was previously unfamiliar with during the activity.	4.39	0.876	171
FL3	Paid attention to both the game screen and the surrounding real street environment.	4.38	0.791	171
FL4	Actively observed the surrounding streetscape instead of only looking at the phone.	4.29	0.878	171
FL5	Stopped to observe buildings, landscapes, or neighborhood details because of the event guidance.	4.19	0.948	171
FL6	Paid more attention to small neighborhood details than during usual walks.	4.07	0.949	171
FL7	Gained a different understanding of the event area through the activity.	4.28	0.835	171
FL8	Felt that I was exploring the city rather than merely playing a game.	4.29	0.886	171

Note. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for the digital flânerie scale was .873.

Conclusion

This study used Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung as a case study to examine how walking-based Geo AR gameplay guides participants' urban exploration and contributes to digital flânerie and initial place connection. The findings show that Pikmin Bloom Tour attracted players not only through game missions and limited-time rewards, but also through its Special Spots and non-linear route design, which encouraged participants to enter, observe, and reinterpret the Kaohsiung event area while completing the missions.

The main finding of this study is that walking-based Geo AR gameplay can transform digital missions into an embodied experience of urban exploration. Participants were not simply immersed in their mobile screens; rather, they shifted their attention between the game interface and real streets. In this process, digital cues became a medium for looking at the city anew. Through digital flânerie, the event area was no longer merely a background for game missions, but became an urban cultural space that could be walked through, observed, and assigned meaning.

This study contributes to previous research on Geo AR games, which has often focused on competition, collection, or continuance intention, by connecting walking-based gameplay with digital flânerie and initial place connection. The case of *Pikmin Bloom* suggests that a non-competitive and low-pressure Geo AR game centered on walking can also serve as a useful lens for understanding interactions between people, digital missions, and urban space.

In practical terms, this study suggests that local tourism or cultural activities incorporating Geo AR missions, Special Spots, and freely explorable routes may guide participants into urban spaces they do not usually encounter, while also increasing their attention to local landscapes and cultural characteristics. This indicates that Geo AR city walking events are valuable not only for game participation, but also for urban guidance, tourism promotion, and the interpretation of cultural landscapes.

However, this study has several limitations. The findings are mainly derived from the specific event context of Pikmin Bloom Tour 2025: Kaohsiung, and the respondents were players who had participated in the event and were willing to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, the results may be influenced by the event design, sample characteristics, and participants' interests. Future research may compare different cities and different forms of Geo AR activities, or further examine whether digital flânerie can develop into longer-term place attachment or future visitation.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT and Gemini were used as AI-assisted tools during the preparation of this manuscript. ChatGPT was used for language translation, proofreading, and formatting assistance. Gemini was used to assist in checking the consistency between selected source passages, in-text citations, and the author's written interpretation. The author reviewed and revised all AI-assisted outputs. The research ideas, study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are the author's own original work.

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Social Media and Youth Audience Participation Motivation in Performance Events: A Case Study of a Central Taiwan Performance Venue

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Social media has become a key channel through which performing arts venues communicate with audiences, reshaping how young people access information and engage in arts and cultural activities. However, limited research has examined how specific social media marketing characteristics influence youth audiences' participation motivation. This study investigates the effects of social media marketing characteristics on young audiences' motivation to participate in performing arts activities in central Taiwan. A questionnaire survey was conducted among individuals aged 18–29 who had attended activities organized by performing arts venues in central Taiwan. A total of 217 valid responses were collected. Entertainment, interactivity, trendiness, and word-of-mouth were examined as dimensions of social media marketing characteristics, while participation motivation comprised exploration and learning, social belonging, cultural identity, and emotional regulation. Structural equation modeling was employed to test the proposed relationships. The findings indicate that social media marketing characteristics significantly and positively influence youth audience participation motivation. Among the four dimensions, trendiness exerted the strongest effect, followed by entertainment and word-of-mouth, whereas interactivity showed a comparatively weaker influence. These results suggest that young audiences particularly value social media content that reflects current trends and popular topics. This study contributes to research on youth audiences and social media marketing and offers practical implications for content planning and audience engagement strategies in performing arts venues.

Keywords: social media, social media marketing, youth audience, participation motivation, performing arts venues

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Introduction

With the widespread adoption of information technologies and the diversification of content platforms, social media has become an important channel through which performing arts venues interact with their audiences. Compared with traditional one-way promotional approaches that primarily emphasize information dissemination, social media places greater emphasis on real-time interaction, content style, and emotional connection. Through continuous content management, performing arts venues are therefore able to cultivate long-term relationships with audiences and strengthen brand engagement. As digital natives, young audiences have also experienced changes in both their social media use and patterns of participation in arts and cultural activities. Rather than relying primarily on face-to-face contact or traditional information channels, young audiences increasingly use social media platforms to obtain information, express opinions, and share experiences. Social media has consequently become an important component of the audience participation process in arts and cultural activities. Within this context, understanding how social media content influences young audiences' motivation to participate has become an important concern for performing arts venues and arts organizations.

However, previous studies on arts audiences have largely focused on the participation behaviors and consumption characteristics of existing audiences. Comparatively limited attention has been paid to young audiences' information acquisition patterns and participation motivations within digital media environments. As Generation Z increasingly emerges as an important cultural consumer segment, its social media practices and patterns of cultural consumption warrant further investigation. To examine the influence of social media on young audiences' participation in arts and cultural activities, this study focuses on a performing arts venue in central Taiwan. In recent years, the venue has actively employed social media for program promotion and brand management, while continuously engaging young audiences through diverse activities. These characteristics make it a meaningful and representative setting for empirical investigation.

This study examines the relationship between social media marketing characteristics and young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities. Specifically, it investigates the effects of entertainment, interactivity, trendiness, and word-of-mouth on youth audience participation motivation, as well as the relative influence of these characteristics. The findings are intended to provide a reference for performing arts venues in developing social media management and audience engagement strategies. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the effects of social media marketing characteristics, including entertainment, interactivity, trendiness, and word-of-mouth, on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.
2. To compare the relative effects of entertainment, interactivity, trendiness, and word-of-mouth on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.
3. To establish an analytical framework linking social media marketing characteristics and youth audience participation motivation, thereby providing a reference for performing arts venues in planning social media management strategies.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Recent studies have increasingly examined the influence of social media platforms on the performing arts sector (Lobodenko et al., 2022; Xu, 2022). These studies have explored the practical applications of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in arts and cultural marketing, indicating that their distinct functional characteristics enable them to assume different roles in brand exposure, audience engagement, and information dissemination. This suggests that platform positioning is closely associated with the selection of appropriate marketing strategies. The following section focuses specifically on social media marketing and young audiences.

Social Media Marketing Characteristics

To systematically examine the effects of social media on consumer psychology and behavior, Kim and Ko (2012) identified five social media marketing characteristics that may shape consumers' emotional engagement with brands and behavioral intentions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and customization. Collectively, these characteristics describe how social media content can foster brand-related emotional involvement and influence subsequent consumer behavior. These five characteristics are described as follows:

1. Entertainment captures the degree to which social media content is enjoyable, visually appealing, and emotionally engaging.
2. Interaction reflects the opportunities available for users to engage in two-way communication with a brand through activities such as commenting, liking, and sharing.
3. Trendiness concerns the extent to which content reflects current trends and aligns with the cultural context of young audiences.
4. Word-of-mouth denotes the ability of content to encourage audience discussion and facilitate further dissemination.
5. Customization concerns the extent to which content is tailored to audience characteristics or delivers personalized value.

These five dimensions provide a useful framework for examining consumers' preferences for and responses to social media content and have been widely applied in research on brand marketing, consumer behavior, and cultural marketing (Tsai et al., 2022; Wee, 2017). By conceptualizing the relationships among social media, brands, and consumers, this framework also offers a relevant perspective for investigating how performing arts venues engage young audiences through social media.

However, customization is excluded from the present study because performing arts venues generally face practical constraints in delivering highly personalized social media content to individual audience segments. Accordingly, the study focuses on four social media marketing characteristics—entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and word-of-mouth—as its primary analytical dimensions. These dimensions provide the basis for the subsequent development of research hypotheses and for examining their effects on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.

Young Audiences' Motivation to Participate in Arts Activities

Previous studies have defined young audiences differently depending on their research objectives and sampling criteria, with age ranges generally spanning from 18 to 39 years.

Some studies emphasize individuals who have reached legal adulthood and possess relatively greater economic independence and capacity for participation in cultural activities (Chang, 2015; Li, 2009; Liu & Chen, 2013). Other studies draw on the theory of Generations to focus on Generation Z, a cohort that has been profoundly influenced by digital media (Lobodenko et al., 2022; Wee, 2017). As this study investigates whether young audiences' participation in cultural activities is influenced by social media marketing, the target population should include those most substantially affected by social media. Accordingly, this study defines young audiences as individuals aged 18 to 29.

Young audiences represent a potential cultural consumer segment and an important target group for audience development in recent years (Lobo & Bhat, 2022). Compared with other age groups, their motivations for participating in arts and cultural activities tend to be more diverse and characterized by a stronger inclination toward active engagement. Their motivations extend beyond artistic appreciation and knowledge acquisition to include social interaction, self-expression, emotional regulation, lifestyle experiences, and value-based identification (Liu, 2023). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of young audiences' participation behaviors requires an examination of relevant motivational theories. Beard and Ragheb (1983) proposed the leisure motivation theory, which identifies four dimensions of leisure participation motivation: intellectual, social, competence–mastery, and stimulus–avoidance motives. This theory emphasizes the diverse needs and purposes that individuals pursue through participation and provides an important foundation for understanding motivations for engaging in arts and cultural activities.

In addition to leisure motivation theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers another important perspective for explaining participation behavior. Deci and Ryan (1985) categorized individual behavior into three motivational orientations: intrinsic motivation, which is driven by personal interest or self-fulfillment; extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external incentives or social expectations; and a motivation, which refers to the absence of clear motivation or direction. SDT further emphasizes the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness during participation. These needs correspond closely to young audiences' emphasis on self-identity, value resonance, and community participation.

Drawing on leisure motivation theory, Self-Determination Theory, and previous studies of young audiences, participation in arts and cultural activities involves not only knowledge exploration but also social interaction, cultural identification, and emotional needs. Accordingly, this study categorizes young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities into four dimensions:

1. Exploration and learning motivation reflects the desire to acquire new knowledge, experience the arts, accumulate aesthetic experiences, and appreciate performances.
2. Social belonging motivation captures participation with friends, family members, or partners to foster interpersonal relationships and emotional connections.
3. Cultural identity motivation denotes participation motivated by identification with artistic values, cultural identity, or support for the ideals of performing arts organizations.
4. Emotion regulation motivation reflects participation aimed at relieving stress, relaxing, or escaping daily pressures, thereby seeking psychological comfort and emotional restoration.

In summary, young audiences' motivations for participating in arts and cultural activities reflect diverse psychological needs. Among Generation Z in particular, motivations related to

social belonging, personal expression, and immediate emotional regulation are especially salient (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

The four motivational dimensions developed in this study may therefore be regarded as corresponding to the psychological needs underlying Generation Z's participation motivations, providing a theoretical basis for the subsequent analysis of how social media characteristics relate to these four dimensions.

Research Framework and Hypotheses

This study investigates the effects of social media marketing characteristics on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities. Social media marketing characteristics serve as the independent variable, whereas participation motivation serves as the dependent variable. Based on the literature and the research objectives, a two-stage analytical approach was adopted. The first stage examines the overall effect of social media marketing characteristics on young audiences' participation motivation, as reflected in the following hypothesis:

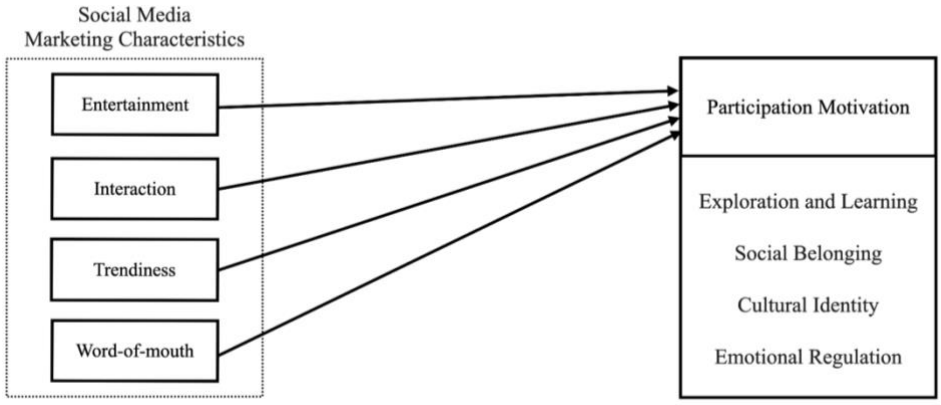
> **H1:** Social media marketing characteristics have a positive effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.

In the second stage, the relative effects of four specific dimensions of social media marketing characteristics—entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and word-of-mouth—were further assessed. The following hypotheses are proposed:

> **H1a:** The entertainment dimension of social media marketing has a positive effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.
> **H1b:** The interaction dimension of social media marketing has a positive effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.
> **H1c:** The trendiness dimension of social media marketing has a positive effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.
> **H1d:** The word-of-mouth dimension of social media marketing has a positive effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.

Based on the above hypotheses, the research framework is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Research Framework of the Second Stage



Methods

Instruments

Drawing on the preceding literature and adapted to the context of the present study, the questionnaire comprised the following constructs. Social media marketing characteristics included four dimensions: entertainment (3 items), interaction (4 items), trendiness (4 items), and word-of-mouth (4 items). Young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities included four dimensions: exploration and learning (4 items), social belonging (4 items), cultural identity (4 items), and emotion regulation (5 items). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Participants and Data Collection

This study targeted young adults in Taiwan aged 18 to 29. Data were collected through non-probability convenience sampling. An online questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms to recruit eligible young audiences. The survey was conducted from April to May 2026. After excluding 27 invalid or ineligible responses, 217 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1
The Demographic Information of Participants (n = 217)

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Biological Sex	Male	82	37.8%
	Female	132	60.8%
	Prefer not to disclose	3	1.4%
Age Group	18–23 years	72	33.2%
	24–29 years	145	66.8%
Education	Senior high school or below	5	2.3%
	Junior college or university	179	82.5%
	Graduate school or above	33	15.2%
Region of Residence	Central Taiwan	101	46.5%
	Northern Taiwan	59	27.2%
	Southern Taiwan	52	24.0%
	Eastern Taiwan	3	1.4%
	Outlying islands	2	0.9%

Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the proposed hypotheses and examine the relationships among the study variables.

Results

Measurement Model Assessment

As shown in Table 2, all constructs demonstrated Cronbach's α values above .70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability.

Table 2
The Overview of the Construct Assessment

Variable	Items	Mean	SD	Loading	Cronbach's α	AVE
Social media marketing characteristics						.684
Entertainment (EN)	3	4.01	0.60	.699	.74	
Interaction (IN)	4	3.87	0.60	.662	.75	
Trendiness (TR)	4	4.07	0.57	.653	.75	
Word-of-mouth (WOM)	4	3.88	0.72	.727	.82	
Motivation to participate in arts activities						.675
Exploration and learning (EL)	4	4.13	0.60	.681	.77	
Social belonging (SB)	4	3.87	0.62	.617	.70	
Cultural identity (CI)	4	4.09	0.57	.638	.73	
Emotion regulation (ER)	5	4.20	0.55	.686	.81	

The correlation results reported in Table 3 indicate that all study constructs were significantly and positively related ($p < .01$), suggesting meaningful associations among the variables and offering preliminary support for the proposed hypotheses.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation Matrix Among the Study Constructs

	EN	IN	TR	WOM	EL	SB	CI	ER
EN	1							
IN	.648**	1						
TR	.607**	.608**	1					
WOM	.457**	.497**	.534**	1				
EL	.481**	.418**	.636**	.497**	1			
SB	.450**	.493**	.455**	.486**	.487**	1		
CI	.530**	.440**	.652**	.482**	.777**	.489**	1	
ER	.479**	.316**	.601**	.459**	.669**	.426**	.667**	1

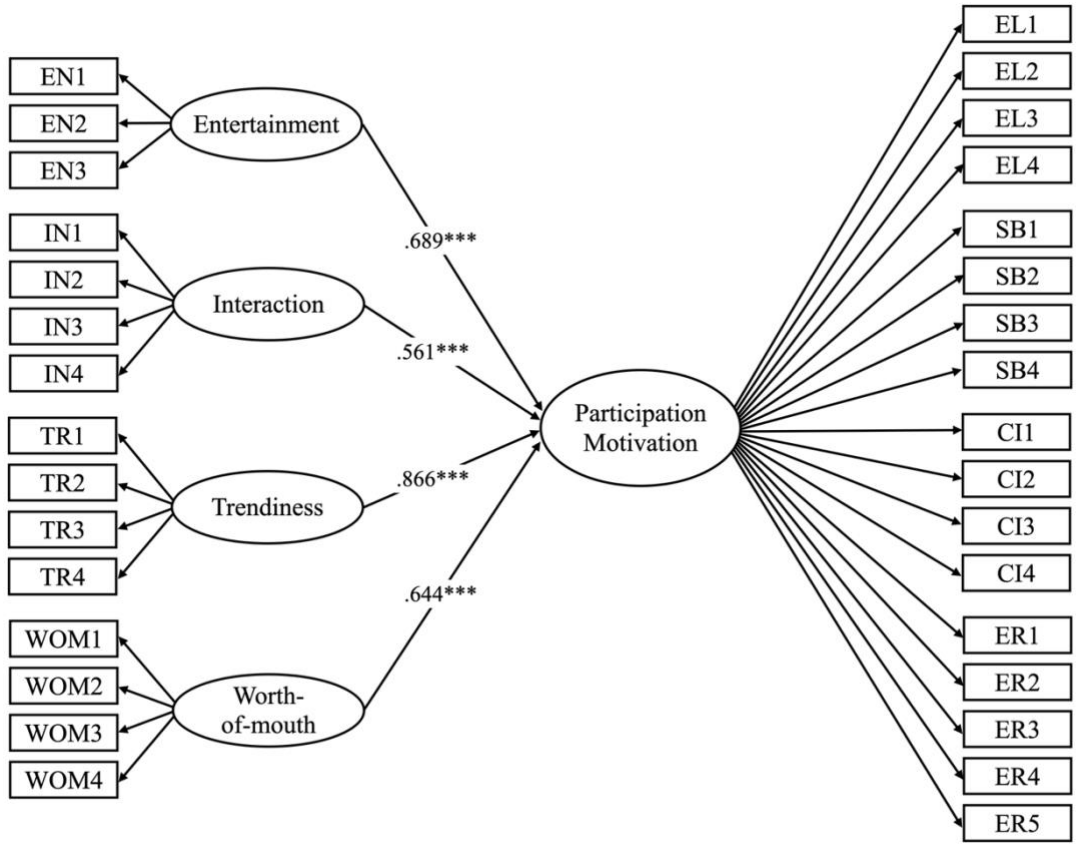
Note. *p < .05; **p < .01 ◦

Table 4 presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis. Most item factor loadings were above 0.50. Although the GFI fell slightly below the recommended threshold, the RMSEA values met the suggested criterion. Taken together, these findings indicate that the measurement model achieved acceptable construct validity and overall model fit.

Table 4
Structural Model Fit Indices

Index	H1	H1a	H1b	H1c	H1d
CMIN/DF	1.802	1.811	1.725	2.052	1.818
GFI	0.811	0.876	0.876	0.858	0.875
RMSEA	0.061	0.061	0.058	0.070	0.062

Figure 2
Results of the Structural Model Analysis



To test the hypotheses proposed in this study, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed. In the first stage, the overall effect of social media marketing characteristics on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities was examined. In the second stage, the relative effects of four specific social media marketing characteristics—entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and word-of-mouth—were further analyzed.

The results showed that social media marketing characteristics had a significant positive effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities ($\beta = .808$, $p < .001$), thereby supporting H1. Further analyses indicated that entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and word-of-mouth each had significant positive effects on participation motivation. Accordingly, H1a through H1d were all supported.

Among the four dimensions, trendiness exerted the strongest effect ($\beta = .866$), followed by entertainment ($\beta = .689$) and word-of-mouth ($\beta = .644$), whereas interaction showed a comparatively weaker effect ($\beta = .561$). The results of the hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Structural Model Path Analysis Results

Research Hypothesis	Path	β	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Result
H1	SM → PM	.808	.139	7.057	< .001	Supported
H1a	EN → PM	.689	.113	6.432	< .001	Supported
H1b	IN → PM	.561	.098	5.668	< .001	Supported
H1c	TR → PM	.866	.156	6.866	< .001	Supported
H1d	WOM → PM	.644	.076	6.666	< .001	Supported

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; S.E. = standard error; C.R. = critical ratio. All paths were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

As reported in Table 5, all proposed hypotheses were supported, and each structural path was statistically significant. These findings indicate that overall social media marketing characteristics, as well as their individual dimensions, positively influence young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study extends Kim and Ko's (2012) framework of social media marketing characteristics to the performing arts context and examines its applicability to young audiences. The findings indicate that these characteristics are relevant not only to commercial brand settings but also to understanding how performing arts venues engage young audiences through social media. While prior research on arts audiences has primarily focused on cultural consumption, performance attendance experiences, and audience characteristics, the present study investigates young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities from a social media marketing perspective. In doing so, it contributes to the literature by addressing the limited attention given to audiences' digital media experiences in previous arts audience research.

The results further show that social media marketing characteristics exerted a significant positive effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities. However, the strength of these effects varied across dimensions, suggesting that young audiences do not respond uniformly to social media content. Rather, their participation motivation is shaped by the specific characteristics of the content they encounter. This finding extends the application of social media marketing research to the context of performing arts audiences and highlights the importance of considering the differentiated effects of individual social media characteristics.

Trendiness as the Most Influential Dimension

Among the four dimensions, trendiness (TR) emerged as the strongest predictor of young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities. Compared with the other social media marketing characteristics, young audiences appeared to place greater value on novel information, emerging trends, and topical content disseminated through performing arts venues' social media platforms. These attributes were associated with stronger motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.

This result is consistent with Kim and Ko's (2012) conceptualization of trendiness as social media's capacity to provide up-to-date information, reflect prevailing trends, and keep users informed about popular topics. For young people who are regularly exposed to social media, these platforms have become an important source of timely and relevant information. Accordingly, when performing arts venues use social media to communicate performance updates, promote forthcoming events, or connect artistic content with contemporary issues and popular topics, they may be more likely to capture young audiences' attention and stimulate their interest in participation.

The findings also align with Francis and Hoefel's (2018) observations of Generation Z, whose members have grown up in a digital environment, are accustomed to processing large volumes of information, and tend to attend to timely and trend-related content. Although the present study examined young audiences aged 18 to 29 rather than Generation Z exclusively, the results similarly suggest that trend-oriented content is particularly effective in drawing young audiences' attention to arts and cultural information.

Overall, social media functions not only as an informational channel but also as a space through which young audiences engage with emerging trends and popular topics. Compared with content that merely communicates event details, content characterized by novelty, topical relevance, and timeliness may be more effective in attracting attention and strengthening young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities.

The Relatively Weaker Effect of Interaction

The findings also indicate that interaction (IN) had the weakest effect on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities among the four social media marketing characteristics. Although the effect of interaction remained statistically significant, its influence was comparatively limited relative to the other dimensions.

This finding is partially consistent with Kim and Ko's conceptualization of interaction as social media's capacity to facilitate two-way communication between brands and consumers. Such communication may enable users to share opinions, exchange information, and develop relationships with brands. However, the interaction dimension in the present study focused primarily on commenting, expressing opinions, and engaging in two-way communication. Because respondents evaluated these items based on their actual experiences with performing arts venues' social media platforms, limited exposure to venue–audience interaction may have reduced their perceived level of interactivity.

The results may further suggest that young audiences engage with arts and cultural content on social media primarily as information recipients rather than as active participants in commenting or direct communication with venues. Compared with opportunities for direct interaction, they may place greater emphasis on the informational value of content, its relevance to current trends, and recommendations from others. This pattern may explain the comparatively weaker influence of interaction on participation motivation.

It is also noteworthy that the interaction model demonstrated comparatively stronger model fit, whereas its effect on participation motivation was the weakest among the four dimensions. By contrast, the trendiness model showed comparatively weaker model fit but yielded the strongest path coefficient. This pattern illustrates that model fit and path strength represent distinct aspects of model evaluation and do not necessarily correspond. A stronger-

fitting interaction model suggests that the specified model more closely represents the observed data; however, trendiness exerted a greater influence on young audiences' motivation to participate in arts and cultural activities. In other words, young audiences may place greater importance on the informational value, novelty, and topical relevance of social media content than on opportunities for two-way communication with performing arts venues. Trend-related content may therefore serve as a more important driver of participation motivation than interactive content.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest that performing arts venues should prioritize trend-oriented and topical social media content when planning their communication strategies, as such content may enhance young audiences' attention to arts and cultural information. Compared with simply increasing interactive functions, young audiences appear to be more responsive to timely information, popular topics, and the level of discussion surrounding content on social media. Entertainment and word-of-mouth also demonstrated significant effects. Performing arts venues may therefore enhance content appeal through short-form videos, behind-the-scenes materials, audience sharing, and user-generated content (UGC), thereby extending the reach and diffusion of their messages.

Overall, social media is no longer merely a promotional tool for performances. It has become an important medium through which young audiences access arts and cultural information, develop motivation to participate, and establish connections with performing arts venues.

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on young audiences of performing arts venues in central Taiwan. Accordingly, the findings may have been influenced by the characteristics of the research setting and sample, and should be generalized to other types of arts and cultural organizations with caution. In addition, because the study relied on a questionnaire survey, it was limited in its ability to explore in depth the reasons underlying respondents' specific perceptions and behavioral tendencies.

The research model was also examined using a two-stage analytical approach; therefore, it did not further compare the differential effects of individual social media marketing characteristics on specific dimensions of participation motivation. Future research may expand the research settings and sources of participants, incorporate variables such as audience involvement and prior performance attendance experience, and employ qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups. Such approaches may provide a more comprehensive understanding of young audiences' decision-making processes regarding arts and cultural participation and the mechanisms through which social media influences these processes.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing tool, was used solely for proofreading and language refinement, including corrections to grammar and spelling and improvements in clarity and precision. No other AI or AI-assisted technologies were used to generate the substantive content of this manuscript. The research ideas, design, procedures, analyses, findings, and discussion were independently developed by the author through the systematic conduct of the study.

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From Embodied Perception to Spatial Construction: Design and Practice of an Open-Source Spatial Education Curriculum at Taichung Green Museumbrary

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In response to the pervasive lack of spatial literacy education in Taiwan and the uneven geographic distribution of cultural resources, this study examines the pedagogical mechanisms of an open-source spatial education curriculum designed around the Taichung Green Museumbrary—a landmark hybrid institution designed by the architecture firm SANAA. Adopting a Design-Based Research (DBR) framework, the project develops an adaptable, open-source curriculum package structurally aligned with the principles of Open Educational Resources (OER). The curriculum synthesizes two primary modalities: a situated sensory promenade based on Le Corbusier's concept of the architectural promenade, followed by a hands-on architectural design workshop. The guided spatial walk-through transforms SANAA's fluid and transparent architectural codes into primary school students' intuitive bodily awareness and embodied perception. Subsequently, modularized learning templates function as an interactive scaffolding, supporting students in transforming transient sensory experiences into coherent three-dimensional spatial compositions. Learning outcomes evaluated through the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) framework reveal substantial advancements across spatial scale cognition, high-order design thinking, and critical social reflexivity concerning the publicness and inclusivity of civic spheres. The findings validate that lowering specialized professional barriers through open educational materials establishes a highly scalable pathway for art institutions to promote cultural equity, transformative museum learning, and democratic citizenship.

Keywords: spatial education, open educational resources, spatial walk-through, museum learning, meaning-making

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Introduction

Contemporary museums have evolved from repositories of cultural objects into dynamic sites of dialogue, participation, and meaning-making (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). Within this context, museum architecture functions not merely as a container for exhibitions but as an active educational medium that shapes perception, interaction, and learning experiences. The Taichung Green Museumbrary, an innovative cultural complex integrating an art museum and a public library, exemplifies this transformation. Designed by SANAA in collaboration with Ricky Liu & Associates Architects + Planners, the building employs interconnected volumes, permeable boundaries, and fluid circulation routes to encourage openness, encounter, and public engagement.

In collaboration with the Taichung Museum of Fine Arts, SiSi. Learn by Space developed Opening the Museum, an open-source Spatial Education programme that translates the architectural characteristics of the Green Museumbrary into age-appropriate learning experiences for students from kindergarten to senior high school. Implemented during the museum's trial operation period, the programme invited students to experience the building as a learning environment through guided Spatial Walk-throughs and model-making activities. This study focuses on the elementary school curriculum and examines how embodied spatial experiences, supported by structured educational scaffolding, can be transformed into architectural understanding, design thinking, and civic awareness.

Research Background and Motivation

As Taiwanese cities continue to expand and transform, public participation in discussions concerning the built environment has become increasingly important. However, meaningful engagement with public space requires more than everyday experience; it depends upon the development of spatial literacy, including the ability to interpret, evaluate, and respond to architectural environments. Spatial Education addresses this need by positioning architecture as a form of lived knowledge closely connected to daily life. Through observation, exploration, and design activities, learners can develop spatial awareness, environmental understanding, and collaborative problem-solving skills.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of spatial literacy, access to Spatial Education remains uneven across Taiwan. Educational resources, cultural institutions, and architecture-related learning opportunities are concentrated in major urban centres, creating disparities between metropolitan and rural communities. To address this challenge, SiSi. Learn by Space adopted the framework of Open Educational Resources (OER) proposed by UNESCO (2019). By developing adaptable, accessible, and reusable educational materials, the project seeks to reduce barriers to participation and support the wider dissemination of Spatial Education in diverse educational contexts.

The project also reflects a strong connection between museum learning and Spatial Education. Constructivist museum education emphasises active participation, multi-sensory engagement, and Meaning-making rather than passive knowledge transmission (Falk & Dierking, 1992; Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). Similarly, Spatial Education encourages learners to understand their environment through direct experience, creative exploration, and design-based inquiry. By integrating these approaches, museums can expand their educational role beyond exhibition interpretation and become platforms for spatial literacy, civic awareness, and public learning.

This study examines the design and implementation of the Opening the Museum curriculum among elementary school students. Using a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, the study investigates how Spatial Walk-through experiences and modular model-making activities support the development of spatial understanding, design thinking, and reflections on the social role of public architecture.

Research Objectives

Grounded in the principles of Open Educational Resources (OER), this study examines the design and implementation of a Spatial Education curriculum developed around the Taichung Green Museumbrary. Situated within a museum learning context, the study explores how elementary school students transform embodied spatial experiences into design understanding through guided observation, creative making, and educational Scaffolding.

The study aims to: First, examine how students translate sensory experiences gained during a Spatial Walk-through into structured spatial concepts and design decisions. Second, evaluate the effectiveness of modular open-source learning materials as Scaffolding tools that support spatial learning and creative expression. Third, investigate the educational outcomes of a hybrid curriculum model that combines embodied spatial exploration with model-making activities, particularly in relation to spatial literacy, design thinking, and awareness of public space.

Theoretical Framework and Curriculum Design Perspectives

Spatial Education and Embodied Perception

Spatial Education positions architecture as a form of lived knowledge that can be experienced, interpreted, and transformed through active engagement with the built environment. Rather than focusing solely on architectural form, Spatial Education encourages learners to explore the relationships between space, human behaviour, and social life. Through observation, movement, and creative making, students develop spatial awareness and learn to recognise how architectural environments shape everyday experiences.

Embodied Perception plays a central role in this process. Spatial understanding emerges not only through visual observation but also through bodily movement and sensory interaction. As learners move through architectural environments, experiences of scale, light, circulation, materiality, and spatial transitions become important sources of knowledge. These embodied encounters provide the foundation for later interpretation and design activity, allowing students to connect personal experiences with broader understandings of architecture and public space. The Spatial Walk-through approach adopted in this study is grounded in this perspective, treating movement through space as a form of inquiry that supports spatial literacy development.

Museum Learning and Meaning-Making

Contemporary museum education has shifted from a transmission-based model toward constructivist approaches that emphasise participation, interpretation, and Meaning-making (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). Within this framework, learning is understood as an active process through which visitors construct personal meanings by connecting new experiences with prior knowledge and lived contexts.

Bruner (1996) argues that learning occurs through the construction and negotiation of meaning rather than the passive reception of information. Similarly, Falk and Dierking (1992) emphasise that museum experiences are shaped by the interaction between personal, social, and physical contexts. Museums therefore function not only as places for acquiring knowledge but also as environments that support exploration, dialogue, and reflection.

The educational design of this study reflects these principles by positioning the Green Museumbrary itself as a learning environment. Rather than delivering architectural knowledge through lectures or guided explanations, the curriculum encourages learners to investigate architectural phenomena through observation, movement, discussion, and creative production. Meaning-making emerges as students interpret spatial experiences and transform them into new understandings through design activities.

Open Educational Resources and Educational Equity

The integration of Open Educational Resources (OER) responds to the growing need for equitable access to educational opportunities. According to UNESCO (2019), OER refers to teaching, learning, and research materials that are openly available for adaptation, reuse, and redistribution. The OER movement seeks to reduce educational barriers associated with geography, institutional resources, and socioeconomic conditions.

Access to Spatial Education in Taiwan remains uneven, with architecture-related educational opportunities concentrated in urban cultural institutions and metropolitan areas. To address this challenge, the curriculum developed in this project was designed according to three key OER principles: accessibility, adaptability, and reusability. Learning materials employ low-cost and easily obtainable resources, enabling implementation in diverse educational settings without requiring specialised facilities or technical expertise.

By adopting an open-source structure, the curriculum extends beyond a single museum programme and becomes a transferable educational framework. This approach supports broader dissemination of Spatial Education while encouraging educators to adapt materials according to local needs and learning contexts.

SANAA, Spatial Experience, and Educational Scaffolding

The Taichung Green Museumbrary provides the physical and conceptual foundation for this curriculum. Designed by SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa) in collaboration with Ricky Liu & Associates, the building reflects SANAA's commitment to openness, transparency, and social interaction (Sejima & Nishizawa, 2011). Through interconnected volumes, visual permeability, and fluid circulation systems, the architecture encourages movement, encounter, and informal social exchange.

These qualities make the Green Museumbrary particularly suitable as a site for Spatial Education. Students are able to experience architectural concepts such as openness, connectivity, accessibility, and publicness through direct engagement with the building rather than through abstract explanation alone.

The curriculum further incorporates Vygotsky's (1978) concept of Scaffolding. Learning activities are structured to support students in progressing from immediate sensory experiences toward increasingly complex spatial understanding and design thinking. The Spatial Walk-

through provides the initial embodied experience, while modular model-making activities offer tangible tools for organising observations into coherent spatial concepts. Through this progression, learners move from perception to interpretation and ultimately to creative spatial production. The combination of embodied experience, museum learning, and educational Scaffolding forms the theoretical foundation of the Opening the Museum curriculum.

Research Methodology and Curriculum Implementation

Design-Based Research Framework

This study adopted a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach to develop and evaluate an Open Educational Resources (OER)-based Spatial Education curriculum within a museum learning environment. DBR supports the iterative refinement of educational interventions in authentic contexts while generating practical and theoretical insights (Brown, 1992; Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). Through cycles of design, implementation, observation, and reflection, the study aimed to establish a transferable model for museum-based Spatial Education.

The curriculum was developed collaboratively by museum educators, spatial education practitioners, and researchers. Architectural concepts derived from the Taichung Green Museumbrary were translated into age-appropriate learning activities and modular teaching materials, with qualitative findings informing ongoing curriculum refinement.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at the Taichung Green Museumbrary during its trial operation period. Participants consisted of twenty-four middle-grade elementary school students from Xitun Elementary School in Taichung City. The programme was delivered within a three-hour learning session that combined a guided Spatial Walk-through with a hands-on model-making workshop.

The morning session focused on experiential exploration of the museum environment, while the afternoon session engaged students in spatial creation activities using modular educational materials. This structure enabled students to connect embodied experiences with creative design processes.

Curriculum Design

The curriculum consisted of two interconnected learning phases: Spatial Walk-through and Modular Spatial Creation.

Spatial Walk-Through

The Spatial Walk-through was designed to encourage active exploration of architectural space through observation, movement, and sensory engagement. Rather than functioning as a conventional museum tour, the activity invited students to investigate spatial qualities such as scale, circulation, transparency, light, and spatial relationships. Learners moved through key areas of the Green Museumbrary, including the central atrium, circulation ramps, library spaces, rooftop terraces, and surrounding public areas.

Facilitators employed open-ended questions and guided observation strategies to encourage interpretation and discussion. Students were invited to consider how architectural design influenced movement, accessibility, encounter, and public use. Through these activities, architectural space became a source of embodied experience and inquiry.

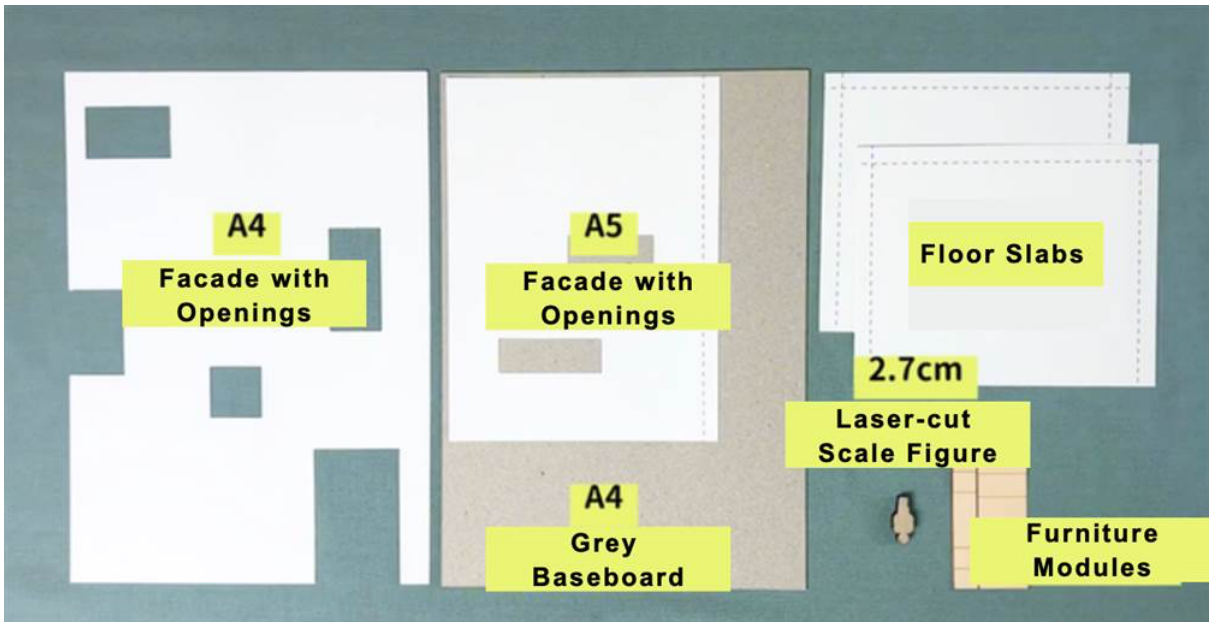
Modular Spatial Creation

Following the walk-through, students participated in a model-making workshop supported by a modular OER learning kit. The workshop was structured in three stages. First, students transformed pre-cut paper components into three-dimensional spatial volumes. Second, they introduced circulation elements and functional programmes while working with a 1:50 scale reference figure to consider spatial proportions and human experience. Finally, students collaboratively assembled individual structures into a larger museum complex, negotiating circulation systems, spatial relationships, and shared public spaces.

The modular design encouraged students to transform observations gathered during the Spatial Walk-through into tangible spatial proposals. As a form of educational Scaffolding, the materials reduced technical barriers while supporting creative experimentation and design thinking (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Open-Source Modular Toolkit Used in the Spatial Creation Workshop



Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using a qualitative triangulation strategy that combined participant observation, artefact analysis, and discourse analysis.

Participant observation was conducted throughout the programme by researchers and teaching assistants, who documented student engagement, spatial interactions, and learning behaviours. Artefact analysis focused on the completed models, examining how students translated spatial experiences into design decisions related to circulation, accessibility, openness, and spatial

organisation. Discourse analysis examined student conversations during collaborative activities to identify processes of negotiation, problem-solving, and Meaning-making.

The collected data were analysed thematically to explore how embodied spatial experiences, educational Scaffolding, and collaborative design activities contributed to the development of spatial literacy, design thinking, and awareness of public architecture.

Results and Discussion

The findings are presented according to the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) framework, which examines changes in participants' knowledge and understanding, skills development, attitudes and values, inspiration and creativity, and behavioural progression. The analysis demonstrates how embodied spatial experiences, educational Scaffolding, and collaborative model-making contributed to the development of spatial literacy and civic awareness (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Student-Generated Spatial Models Demonstrating Openness and Encounter



Knowledge and Understanding

Analysis of student artefacts indicates that participants developed a sophisticated understanding of architectural openness, circulation, and spatial relationships. Rather than treating walls as fixed boundaries, many students used openings, connections, and visual corridors as active design elements. Their models demonstrated an emerging awareness of transparency, accessibility, and movement, reflecting key architectural concepts observed during the Spatial Walk-through.

Students frequently referred to light, visibility, and environmental connections when explaining their designs. These observations suggest that embodied encounters with the Green Museumbrary enabled learners to connect material qualities with broader ideas about openness and public accessibility. Architectural concepts that are often abstract in classroom settings became concrete through direct spatial experience.

Skills Development

The curriculum supported the development of practical design skills and spatial reasoning. The introduction of a 1:50 scale figure encouraged students to evaluate proportions from a human-centred perspective rather than relying on intuitive estimations. Students adjusted floor heights, circulation routes, and spatial functions according to human use, demonstrating an emerging understanding of scale and spatial organisation.

Collaborative design activities further strengthened problem-solving and communication skills. During the collective assembly phase, students negotiated circulation systems, shared public areas, and connections between individual structures. These discussions required participants to consider accessibility, visitor movement, and spatial coherence, indicating the development of both design thinking and collaborative decision-making abilities.

Attitudes and Values

The findings suggest a notable shift in students' perceptions of museums and public architecture. Prior to participation, museums were often described as formal and restrictive environments. Following the programme, students increasingly conceptualised museums as open, inclusive, and socially connected spaces.

One student explained that their proposed museum design intentionally removed barriers and encouraged access from multiple directions, reflecting an understanding of public space as a shared civic resource. Such responses indicate that the educational experience supported broader reflections on accessibility, inclusion, and the social responsibilities of cultural institutions.

Inspiration and Creativity

The open-ended structure of the modular learning materials encouraged students to generate highly original spatial solutions. Rather than reproducing existing architectural forms, participants adapted and extended concepts encountered during the walk-through to create new configurations.

For example, one group organised its structures around a large central public plaza designed for performances and community gatherings. The proposal demonstrated an ability to integrate circulation, visibility, and social interaction into a coherent spatial system. These outcomes suggest that the OER-based curriculum successfully balanced creative freedom with architectural reasoning, allowing students to explore alternative possibilities for public space.

Activity, Behaviour and Progression

Evidence of learning transfer was observed beyond the formal programme itself. Teachers reported that students continued discussing architectural features and public spaces after

leaving the museum environment. Learners began comparing surrounding buildings with architectural elements encountered during the walk-through and questioned how different design decisions affected visibility, privacy, accessibility, and public use.

This behavioural continuation suggests that students had moved beyond passive observation and developed a more critical awareness of the built environment. According to the GLOs framework, such transfer of learning into everyday contexts represents an important indicator of sustained educational impact.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate the educational potential of combining museum learning, Spatial Education, and Open Educational Resources within a single pedagogical framework. The Spatial Walk-through provided opportunities for Embodied Perception, enabling students to experience architectural concepts through movement and sensory engagement. The modular model-making activities subsequently functioned as Scaffolding, supporting the transformation of sensory experiences into tangible design outcomes.

The results align with constructivist perspectives proposed by Bruner (1996), Hein (1998), and Hooper-Greenhill (2007), which view learning as a process of active Meaning-making rather than passive information acquisition. Students did not simply learn about architecture; they interpreted, negotiated, and reconstructed architectural ideas through creative practice.

Furthermore, the OER structure proved effective in reducing barriers to participation. By utilising accessible materials and adaptable learning resources, the curriculum demonstrates how Spatial Education can be disseminated beyond specialised institutions and urban centres. The model therefore contributes not only to museum education but also to broader discussions of educational equity and cultural accessibility.

Overall, the findings suggest that the integration of Embodied Perception, Scaffolding, and OER can provide an effective pathway for cultivating spatial literacy, civic awareness, and design thinking among young learners. The Green Museumbrary functioned not only as a museum building but also as an educational medium through which students developed new ways of understanding, experiencing, and imagining public space.

Conclusion

This study employed a Design-Based Research (DBR) framework to develop, implement, and evaluate an open-source spatial education curriculum centred on the Taichung Green Museumbrary. By combining a Spatial Walk-through with modular model-making activities, the project examined how Open Educational Resources (OER) can support the development of spatial literacy, civic awareness, and design thinking among primary school students.

The findings indicate that Embodied Perception plays a crucial role in spatial learning. Through direct engagement with SANAA's architectural environment, students experienced concepts such as transparency, openness, circulation, and encounter through bodily movement and sensory observation. These experiences provided a foundation for Meaning-making, allowing learners to reinterpret architectural phenomena and transform sensory impressions into design decisions during the model-making process. Rather than functioning as passive visitors,

students became active interpreters of space and participants in the construction of architectural meaning.

The study further demonstrates the effectiveness of modular OER materials as a form of educational Scaffolding. The use of accessible materials and standardised templates reduced technical barriers and enabled students to focus on higher-order design tasks, including spatial organisation, circulation planning, and collaborative problem-solving. The adaptability, accessibility, and extensibility of the curriculum suggest that OER can provide an effective strategy for expanding access to spatial education beyond resource-rich urban contexts.

Beyond spatial cognition, the curriculum also contributed to the development of civic awareness and social responsibility. Students increasingly viewed museums and public architecture as inclusive civic spaces that welcome people with diverse backgrounds, interests, and needs, rather than as exclusive cultural institutions. Their design proposals frequently emphasized openness, flexibility, and opportunities for social interaction, reflecting an emerging understanding of architecture as a medium that supports diversity, encourages public participation, and fosters meaningful community engagement.

From the perspective of museum education, the findings support constructivist approaches proposed by Bruner (1996), Hein (1998), and Hooper-Greenhill (2007), which emphasise learning as an active process of interpretation and knowledge construction. The Green Museumbrary functioned not only as a cultural venue but also as an educational medium through which students connected personal experience, spatial observation, and creative production. The project therefore demonstrates how contemporary museums can activate architecture itself as a learning resource and a platform for public engagement.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the large scale of the Green Museumbrary occasionally generated physical fatigue among younger participants, suggesting the need for shorter walk-through routes or additional rest intervals in future implementations. Second, although the modular kit effectively supported learning, its predefined structural logic may have limited opportunities for more experimental forms of spatial expression. Future iterations could incorporate a wider range of materials to encourage greater design diversity.

Overall, this study suggests that the integration of Spatial Education, Museum Education, and Open Educational Resources offers a promising framework for cultivating spatial literacy and civic imagination. By transforming architectural experience into an accessible educational process, the model provides a replicable pathway for museums seeking to expand public engagement and promote educational equity. Future applications may further extend this framework across diverse cultural institutions and community contexts, strengthening the role of spatial learning within contemporary arts and humanities education.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that ChatGPT, a generative AI tool developed by OpenAI, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from ChatGPT, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures,

findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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From Two Kinds of Fear in Communication to Transformative Intercultural Communication for Creative Democracy

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Democracy is creative. Dewey argued that democracy must be continuously renewed by each generation to avoid stagnation. The task can be accomplished only by inventive effort and creative activity, and communication is at the core of creative democracy (Dewey, 1939). However, is free communication with no fear possible, in the new realities of social media, schools, landscape, and broader society that have created social forces that challenge core assumptions about democracy? These challenges get bigger and deeper, between different generations, race, genders, political orientations and ideologies, while proving that we have not made much progress in democracy and need to create and recreate it. In this study, I take up such warnings by arguing that transformative intercultural communication can be inventive effort for creative democracy. By focusing on Dewey's notion of communication, this study examines two kinds of fear that block communication: uncertainty (vulnerability, ambivalence) and power associated with language. Then, this paper explores how those fears can be changed through transformative intercultural communication, particularly by highlighting aesthetic, poetic, and attentive listening, social imagination, and multi-directional communication that exist in relationship to the experiences of those who participate in communication. This study suggests that Dewey's analysis of intercultural communication as leading to a fusion of horizons can help us move beyond the impasse of multiculturalism and democratic education, in persistently and newly segregated contexts within our society and across the globe, and learn and grow as community.

Keywords: Dewey, democracy, communication, intercultural

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Introduction

Today we see conflicts, wars, hatred, and violence in many places on the globe. Even in USA, whose core value and identity has been democracy, People are afraid to express their opinions at workplace or on social media, and scholars are feared to present their research freely. If they are non-white Americans and immigrants, it becomes more serious as safety problem. They are warned to be cautious in every conversation and action, so that they did not become direct victims of hatred attacks and discrimination, or get expelled. With these challenging conditions, how will we be able to handle important global issues together and pursue common values? The problem exists closely because this is happening within educational institutions. Many students said that they were fearful, particularly when it came to expressing their opinions in their classrooms post-elections. It is incredibly unfortunate that students face such unnecessary challenges in American schools where they have to learn democracy.

Such situation proves that we have not made much progress in democracy. It also demonstrates that the democracy is undergoing change, while, as Garrison (2012) points out, many American students assume their democracy is complete and only requires preserving. Dewey wrote this article in 1939 when he thought they faced crisis in democracy. It is timely and critically important for us to re-read John Dewey's essay "Creative democracy – the task before us" in today's crisis in democracy. This crisis can be an opportunity for moving up to another level of democracy. As Dewey stated, "the most experienced and wisest men of the country gathered to take stock of conditions and to create the political structure of a self-governing society" (p. 224) He continued to say that, "It was a country of physical opportunity and invitation" and "at the present time, the frontier is moral, not physical" (p. 225). The frontier is moral today, but is it truly a country of physical opportunity and invitation now? The crisis of two hundred years ago and at Dewey's time called out social and political inventiveness is with us today in a form which puts a much heavier demand on human creativeness.

Communication as the Core in Creative Democracy

Dewey emphasized that "the task can be accomplished only by inventive effort and creative activity" and "it is in part because the depth of the present crisis is due in considerable part to the fact that for a long period we acted as if our democracy was something that perpetuated itself automatically" (p. 225). Many thought and still think the U.S. accomplished democracy and the task is done. In part, assuming and acting like that seems to contribute to this crisis. For example, when a college course discusses racism, there are often students who say "it's enough" "actually we talk about this too much and that's a problem". Then the professor, especially non-white, and other students stop and avoid talking about racism in their classroom. For Dewey, however,

> Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process. Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education. (p. 229)

Therefore, although there will be uncomfortableness, the current "striving" to be democratic, rather than stopping or avoiding talking about racism, is meaningful and important itself. It is

ends and means to the further action toward more mature democracy. Therefore, it is educative.

At the core of such inventive and creative efforts, according to Dewey, there is free communication. As an experience in connection with others and surroundings, "free interaction with surrounding conditions, especially the human surroundings" (p. 229) is the tool for creative democracy. This free interaction "develops and satisfies need and desire by increasing knowledge of things as they are." "Knowledge of conditions as they are is the only solid ground for communication and sharing; all other communication means the subjection of some persons to the personal opinion of other persons." The wonder, that only unknown and not pre-possessed knowledge can give, raises need and desire, and out of which grow purpose and direction of energy that "help go beyond what exists, and hence beyond knowledge, beyond science" and "continually open the way into the unexplored and unattained future" (p. 229). It is not disturbing knowledge, but shows a progression and the importance of such knowledge as the tool and energy for the good work in the future.

Then, promoting need and desire is the important task. Before then, however, Dewey elaborated the condition of free communication. Dewey (LW 14) strongly believed that mutual suspicion, abuse, fear, and hatred choke free beliefs, free expression, free assembly, and free communication (p. 228). They also destroy the essential condition of the democratic way of living. He argues that the heart and final guarantee of democracy is in unrestricted gatherings of neighbors and friends to converse freely with one another. Hence, the more suspicion, fear, and hatred our society spreads, the stronger efforts we need for free and genuine communication with one another. Dewey continued to explain this in his contemporary situation: "When I think of the conditions under which men and women are living in many foreign countries today, fear of espionage, with danger hanging over the meeting of friends for friendly conversation in private gatherings, I am inclined to believe than the heart and final guarantee of democracy is in free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner to discuss back and forth what is read in uncensored news of the day…" (p. 227). This is not just a story of Dewey's time or far foreign countries, but the everyday experiences of people, like students of color or foreign professors' story. college classroom, or immigrants of color who live in whites' dominant neighborhood and behave extra carefully.

For Dewey, democracy should be discussed at the level of human associations. Two criteria for evaluating the moral or ethical worth of them include the numerous and varied shared interests they involve and the full and free interplay with external groups they promote (MW 9: 89). According to Dewey, a democracy is primarily "a mode of associated living, of *conjoint communicated* experience beyond a form of government" (MW 9: 93). As Waks (2011) drew on Dewey's work of listening and democracy, this implies that communication should include listening, and the listening is not one-way or straight-line listening but should be transactional listening. Herein lies the problem of not free communication. We don't listen well. While we may listen to what is spoken, we don't attentively listen to the language and the other who speaks it (Jones, 1999; Langmann, 2015; Waks, 2010). Then, is free communication possible? What does block it, and how can we remove the blocks?

Is Free Communication Possible? (Or, What Blocks Intercultural Communication?)

Intercultural communication is important now in this interconnected global era. But, intercultural communication is not new; it does not simply mean communication between just two different countries' people, but people from different cultures, ages, gender, orientation,

religion, position, needs, or parents and teenagers. According to Dewey, "For everything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings into sets and cliques, into antagonistic sects and factions, and thereby undermines the democratic way of life" (pp. 227–228). That is why we have to go beyond current assemblies, which ironically are dividing more. Assembly and association require what Dewey meant "fullness of communication" by two-way communication including "listening." Mutual suspicion, abuse, fear and hatred block free intercultural communication and these do not just hinder speech but also listening, because we humans naturally have fear of being vulnerable and shaking their foundation and changing their beliefs. When we think about fear as barriers in promoting free communication, we usually assume fear that the oppressed people possess. However, both sides of communication can have fear, and this universally happens as a profound and innate pattern of human reaction to a new and different others or experiences. Therefore, to understand fear in intercultural communication and think about how to overcome it and move forward is important to intercultural education and our growth and learning.

Two Kinds of Fear

Waks (2010) says we need special listening that helps learners to experience new possibilities of thought and expression within themselves and be more willing to open up and share deep feelings with others with a sense of acceptance and fascination from the listener.

Uncertainty (Vulnerability, Ambivalence)

Dewey's *The Quest for certainty* (1929) claims that we humans seek certainty. This hinders change and growth. But this also can work for growth, if it meets uncertainty and ambivalent state. Hence, uncertainty gives us drive to certainty, pushes ourselves to expand and grow. To meet uncertainty, we need to be vulnerable to different others. Therefore, uncertainty and vulnerability are not threatening but good and necessary for learning and growth. Facing uncertainty is hard in some cultures, especially. For example, in many of east Asian countries, it feels like almost impossible for the people who are culturally expected to answer only one correct and only outcomes. Also, vulnerability is not about losing, but about breaking and growing self.

Many situations involving humans are qualitative contexts requiring intuiting data, with the difficult task of intelligent selection and discrimination. In this view, empathy is "the best source of data in the social sciences and in moral deliberation" (Garrison, 1997, p. 37). Without empathy there is always a danger of misunderstanding. The empathetic and generous recognition of the needs, desires, and hopes of others may propel us beyond the bounds of our fixed selves. If we allow ourselves to grow, we will go through the process of losing our "selves," our personal identity, many times along the way. To grow, we must be vulnerable and risk ourselves in relationships of care and concern (Garrison, 1997, pp. 37–38). This reminds us of Dewey's concept of education, which is communication toward growth. Dewey (1916) considers all communication is like art and educative, because communication is a process of sharing experiences till it becomes a common possession and has changed and enlarged experiences. In this process, it is inevitable that an individual must be vulnerable and flexible and be able to modify his/her own possessions, which means growth. Education is all one with growing.

Power and Language

The other kind of fear in intercultural communication is caused by the power in language. Language is significant especially in intercultural communication, because people use language as media communication but there may be people who use the language as a foreign language.

Like Waks, Langmann (2015) also suggests poetic and attentive listening. But she approaches with more focus on language from a critical perspective based on postcolonial critique, pointing out that the western simple idea of language as tool has a problem in intercultural communication. Citing Ashcroft et al, Langmann says there is the risk that one overlooks the "hierarchy of languages" in promoting intercultural communication and dialogue in education, namely that control and power over the "right" or "proper" language was a major feature of Western imperial suppression of the non-West (Ashcroft et al., 1989). As Gayatri Spivak (1988) shown, the subaltern woman of the third world can only be heard by her oppressors if she speaks in the language of the oppressor, making the abandonment of her culturally customary ways of knowing and thinking a necessary part of many postcolonial situations. As Langmann analyses Spivak's, this forced abandonment is due to the fact that critical thinking tends to articulate its relation to the other solely within a Western hegemonic vocabulary. Hence, Langmann says, if we want to speak and listen to the other as *other* in intercultural education, that is, as someone whose otherness is never completely knowable or appropriable by me, language seems to be at the same time the path *and* the non-path in education (Derrida, 1996).

Aesthetic Approach to Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication as Dewey's concept of "art as experience" can contribute to these efforts, because art has the power to break all such fear, prejudice and preconception, and gives rise to imagination to see best possibilities in an individual and a situation (Garrison, 1997; Kim, 2009). In communication both the speaker and listener must expand their imaginations to encompass the other, the attitudes of both are broadened (Waks, 2009, p. 120). Such imagination deepens recognition of their common problems. *Communication should be aesthetic and aesthetic communication is necessary instrument to get to aesthetic experience.*

Langmann explores new ways of relating to language to speak and listen to the other as other, and discuss how a more poetic attentive listening to the silence between us could open up for a non-hierarchical and transformative intercultural communication in difference.

Communication is essential to get to aesthetic experience which is summative and ultimate experience. This communication is not one direction, but inter, cross, and both – exists in relationship to the experiences of participants. This especially needs poetic (Langmann) and attentive listening. We cannot anticipate it along with a calculated plan. Simpson, Jackson, and Aycock (2005) explain the fact in this way: "Aesthetic experiences almost have a life of their own, are unpredictable, and cannot be stereotyped. They appear unexpectedly and visit again without notice. They are characterized by novelty, suspense, and surprise even when anticipated." (p. 141). Its "transitory" nature, Kerdeman says, "is especially true in educational settings" (2005, p. 91). Aesthetic experience is also "vulnerable" and "fragile." All these qualities typically are not valued in formal educational settings. Formal education, Custodero writes, is "often limited to single pathways and predetermined outcomes, where

'what if' questions are rarely welcomed – especially in today's political climate of high stakes testing" (2005).

Kim et al.'s (2018) study shows intercultural experience of teacher candidate students who participated in global project in their teacher education course at a university in USA. Through intercultural communication with peer teacher candidate students in another country, the participants from both cultures not only reflected on their experience, but they also gained insights that they had not considered. The experience ultimately expanded their ideas of good teaching and eliminated any stereotypes that they may have had. The importance of overcoming stereotypes is emphasized in multicultural education (Gomez, 1991). The participants learned, through communicating and working with the teacher candidates in another country, how things that can be seen as trivial. This experience made them more aware of every little intricacy of teaching. The participants also voiced about ideas they would not have thought about before the communication experience. While the participants found both differences and similarities between two different cultures, they said that the experiences from intercultural communication were important because they realized that many education systems have the same issues. In this way, communicating with teacher candidates in another country helped the participants to develop their tolerance to different culture and cosmopolitan values.

Langmann hopefully said we need to cultivate this but did not suggest how. Waks said it's not directly taught but suggested several things that help. It is important being exposed and facing to be vulnerable as many as you can.

Conclusions

Intercultural communication is not about politics, but about learning and growth as individuals and countries. As Waks (2007) suggested, "Dewey's analysis of intercultural communication as leading to a fusion of horizons can help us move beyond the impasse of multiculturalism and democratic education in our situation of re-segregated metropolitan schools" (p. 35). The suggestions of this paper will be to further contribute to the discussion on creative democracy for USA, and beyond, world as community. In Green's term, "social imagination" (1995) works like an engine of a mustang, moving towards the community in the making that Dewey called democracy. "Observation supplies the near, imagination the remote" (*How we think*, p. 291).

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The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)
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Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi
Japan 460-0008
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