

Contemporary Art Access and Distribution Channels: A Case of Thai Undergraduate Student

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Abstract

The contemporary art market has witnessed substantial global growth since the 1990s, making access and distribution channels increasingly essential for emerging artists, including undergraduate art students. This study investigates whether differences in university rankings influence students' preferences regarding contemporary art access and distribution channels. A quantitative research method was employed, utilizing a closed-ended questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. A total of 450 undergraduate art students from four Bangkok-based institutions—two top-ranking and two general universities—were selected through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using independent sample t-tests to compare students' preferences between the two groups. The findings reveal that students from both groups reported similar levels of access to various contemporary art channels, including public art centers, private galleries, mass media, websites, and social media platforms. However, notable differences were observed in distribution preferences: students from general universities showed significantly greater reliance on traditional channels such as public art centers, private galleries, mass media, and Facebook, whereas students from top-tier universities were more evenly distributed across traditional and online platforms. These findings highlight the continuing relevance of traditional art spaces while underscoring the growing importance of digital channels in contemporary art dissemination.

Keywords: Contemporary art, Art access channel, Art distribution channel, Art market, Social media

Introduction

Contemporary art encompasses artworks created by artists who are presently active in their fields. It comprises a diverse range of artistic practices, approaches, and mediums that reflect contemporary cultural, social, economic, and political concerns. Mediums utilized in contemporary art are wide-ranging and can include painting, sculpture, installation, performance, video, and new media such as digital art. Contemporary artists engage with a multitude of concepts, mediums, and materials to articulate their ideas and perspectives. Their creations often invite viewers to question, interpret, and establish connections with the world around them in unconventional and thought-provoking ways (Meyer, 2013; Smith, 2009). Art students consider themselves to be among the creators of art or artists themselves. By the time they

learn they develop themselves by creating works of art and releasing them to the public. Hence, the study of contemporary art plays an important role in our society today. In Thailand, contemporary art subjects are considered essential to the study of art and design. Most universities in Thailand offer art courses, both in the capital and large cities in other regions of the country. In Bangkok in particular, several institutions with art and design faculties are private and government-owned; each has a distinctive reputation and expertise.

Having the opportunity to access art is another important thing in developing creative work. The Bangkok metropolitan area boasts a diverse array of public art centers and private galleries, serving as vibrant channels for experiencing art. These

spaces offer accessible venues for people to visit and engage with a wide range of artworks. In addition to physical spaces, mass media serves as a conventional channel for art access. Furthermore, the internet has emerged as a popular platform, providing another avenue for people to explore and interact with art. Public art centers and private galleries, mass media, as well as the internet, are not only the space where artists can show their works but also can present and distribute their works of art as well. Furthermore, these spaces are the meeting places between sellers and buyers, artists, and collectors. This research aims to compare these channels involving contemporary art access and distribution.

In 2003, the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) emerged as a credible precursor to university ranking. As a result, a global classification and ranking of universities became a reality, leading to inevitable comparisons among national and international institutions. Currently, there are six Criteria for Evaluating Rankings Systems including Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), Leiden University, Times Higher Education (THE), U-Multirank, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), and Scimago Institutions Ranking (Scimago) (Marginson, 2014). This study utilized the Scimago ranking as a reference point for selecting two distinct levels of art institutions within the Bangkok metropolitan area: the top ten universities versus general universities in the arts and humanities fields. The research samples comprised Thai undergraduate students enrolled in art courses at the institutions previously mentioned within the Bangkok metropolitan area.

This study comprises two research questions. Firstly, it seeks to investigate whether the varying levels of art universities influence the preferences of undergraduate students regarding contemporary art access channels. Secondly, it aims to determine whether these different levels of art universities also impact students' choices regarding artwork distribution

channels. The results shed light on the prevailing trends in the attitudes of the younger generation towards accessing and distributing contemporary art.

Literature review

Contemporary art

Contemporary art encompasses the creative output of living artists within the current era. It spans a broad spectrum of styles, techniques, and mediums. The subject matter of contemporary art frequently reflects present-day cultural, social, and political viewpoints. Notably, its defining features include diversity and a penchant for experimentation, often defying conventional artistic norms and pushing the boundaries of subject matter, materials, and presentation methods (Smith, 2009). Contemporary art subject is known for its diversity, complexity, and paradoxical nature (Coskun Onan et al., 2021). The characteristics of contemporary art are the connection between art and life, as well as the combination of various artistic activities. (Bolat, 2021). Studying contemporary art in Thailand has become increasingly widespread today. Art students study content, medium, and techniques, employing them in their creations to gain entry into the contemporary art market.

Contemporary art market

The contemporary art market has experienced significant growth globally since the 1990s. Today, artists can showcase their work through physical spaces such as public art centers and private galleries, or online channels i.e. artists' websites and social media. Public art centers and private galleries have always been essential places for experiencing art. One of the main benefits of these locations is accessibility, as they welcome all types of visitors. Moreover, some art museums and galleries hire curators to guide viewers regarding works of art. It is common for new and young artists such as undergraduate art students to use these channels to gain recognition for their artworks. Presently, undergraduate art students are one group of young artists who use personal computers and smartphones to share their digital creations (Mead et al, 2017).

Since the inception of the internet in the 1970s, digital art creation and computer networks have been extensively used for artistic endeavors, including

producing, distributing, and selling art. In the 1990s, with the advent of the internet environment being unique, a new form of art emerged known as internet-based art or net art, which has been prevalent ever since (Kelomees, 2019). The Internet has become a major player in the art market (Sidorova, 2019), and as a result, online marketing platforms have become more important. The online art market differs from the traditional art market in that it offers convenience and flexibility. Buyers and collectors can trade artwork more easily and quickly online, at any time and from anywhere. They can search for and find interesting pieces more efficiently (Winkleman 2015) . Furthermore, this online art marketplace could expand to reach new buyers, thereby significantly enlarging the art market. However, there is still a debate about whether traditional generations will accept online sales channels (Sidorova, 2019).

Over the last few decades, the internet has undergone significant advancements leading to the emergence of a new era known as the post-internet era. This term refers to the current trend in contemporary art creation and activities that originate from the internet or online culture, which began in the early 2000s and continues to this day (Kelomees, 2019). Consequently, online culture has become widespread, blurring the lines between online and offline activities. In the post-internet era, people live their daily lives, communicate, and express themselves in an online environment that has become as essential as our natural surroundings (Kelomees, 2019) . Both artists and audiences have embraced online activities as a part of their daily lives. Even traditional artists cannot avoid this change and eventually end up working within the internet network. In today's world, it can be referred to as a means of experiencing art. Artists today are utilizing the internet to create, distribute, and sell their artworks, providing benefits to both individuals and the art market (Blume, 2017). In the post-internet era, artists have the means to establish direct connections with their audiences via various online channels such as personal websites and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, eliminating the need for traditional curatorial intermediaries (Kumjim, 2018). The advent of virtual exhibitions and online galleries has introduced fresh opportunities to the art world (Blume, 2017), while the expansive reach of social media now spans vast

networks of audiences (Gross & Pitts, 2016). Platforms like Instagram provide artists with a direct avenue to sell their work to buyers, bypassing the need for gallery commissions. Additionally, interested curators can easily discover and access artists' artworks through these digital platforms. Instagram serves as a platform that fosters learning in art and enhances the aesthetic experience of viewers at art exhibitions (Suess, 2018). Consequently, it gains increased attention within community art galleries (Budge & Burness, 2017) . According to a survey conducted by museums and galleries, Instagram is utilized by viewers to aid in the re-curation of exhibitions (Weilenmann, Hillman, & Jungselius, 2013). Given the significant influence of social media on daily life, particularly among younger demographics (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016), platforms like Instagram play a pivotal role in connecting art exhibitions with new and younger audiences (Barron & Leask, 2017). However, there is limited research available for other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

This research examines the attitudes of young Thai undergraduate students toward various channels for accessing art and distributing artworks. These channels encompass both conventional avenues such as public art centers and private galleries, mass media, as well as contemporary platforms like online platforms (artists' websites), and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Art centers and galleries in Thailand

Indeed, galleries have traditionally served as significant sources of learning beyond formal educational institutions (Luckerhoff & Falk, 2016). In Thailand, there's a vibrant art scene with numerous public art museums and private galleries, particularly concentrated in Bangkok. Among the prominent public art centers are Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, The Bangkok National Museum, Museum Siam, The National Gallery of Thailand, Thailand Creative and Design Center, and so on. Private art galleries also thrive, with notable venues such as 101 Tonson Art Gallery, Bangkok Citycity Gallery, Bangkok University Gallery, Gallery VER, JWD Art Space, Numthong Art Space, SAC Gallery, and Tang Contemporary Art among others. Indeed, public art museums and art galleries are not limited to the Bangkok metropolitan

area; they can also be found in other provinces and large cities throughout Thailand. These institutions contribute to the cultural landscape of various regions, offering opportunities for local communities to engage with and appreciate art.

Research methodological approach

In line with previous research exploring audience behaviors and art engagement through digital platforms (Kelomees, 2019; Sidorova, 2019; Suess, 2018), this study adopted a quantitative methodology to systematically assess the preferences of undergraduate art students. A closed-ended questionnaire was employed, consisting of items measured using a five-point Likert scale. The respondents were selected through simple random sampling from four universities in the Bangkok metropolitan area. The total sample comprised 450 students, divided into two institutional categories: top-ranking and general universities. To analyze the data, independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare mean scores between the two groups. This analytical approach was chosen to determine statistically significant differences in students' preferences regarding contemporary art access and distribution channels.

Methodology

Research design and sampling

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the preferences of Thai undergraduate art students regarding contemporary art access and distribution channels. Participants were selected through simple random sampling from four universities located in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Two of the institutions—Chulalongkorn University and Silpakorn University—represent Thailand's top ten art universities according to the 2023 Scimago Institutions Ranking. These institutions were selected due to their academic prestige, long-standing reputation in the arts and humanities, and active engagement in national and international contemporary art scenes.

The decision to focus on universities within Bangkok was based on the high concentration of art institutions, the availability of diverse contemporary art spaces, and the logistical feasibility for data collection. This setting allowed for a controlled comparison across

institutional types while ensuring participants had comparable access to urban art environments.

The other two institutions—Srinakharinwirot University and Pohchang Academy of Arts—represent general universities with established art programs. These were chosen to reflect the experiences of students in more conventional, accessible, and practice-oriented educational environments. Like the top-tier universities, these institutions are also based in Bangkok, enabling a fair contextual comparison between student groups within the same metropolitan art ecosystem.

A total of 450 valid responses were collected from undergraduate art students across the four universities. The survey instrument consisted of a closed-ended questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disapproval and 5 indicated strong approval. The questionnaire explored students' preferences for various access and distribution channels, including public art centers, private galleries, mass media, websites, and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter).

This process of comparison is grounded in the research framework, which outlines the hypothesized relationship between institutional type and art engagement behavior. The research framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Data collection and analysis

Data were analyzed using independent sample t-tests to compare the mean scores of students' preferences from top-ranking and general universities. This statistical method allowed for the identification of significant differences in attitudes toward various art access and distribution channels between the two groups. The results were interpreted to assess the influence of institutional context on the behaviors and tendencies of undergraduate students regarding contemporary art engagement.

Results

A quantitative approach was employed in this study, and a total of 450 undergraduate art students participated. These students were divided into two groups. The first group comprised students from two of Thailand's top universities according to the 2023 Scimago ranking: Chulalongkorn University (24.9%) and Silpakorn University (23.3%). The second group

consisted of students from two general universities, Srinakharinwirot University (26.2%) and Pohchang Academy of Arts (25.6%), selected via simple random sampling. The majority of participants identified as

female (51.6%), with the remaining being male (48.4%). Regarding age distribution, most participants fell within the 18-22 years category (87.6%), while a smaller percentage were aged >22-25 years (12.4%).

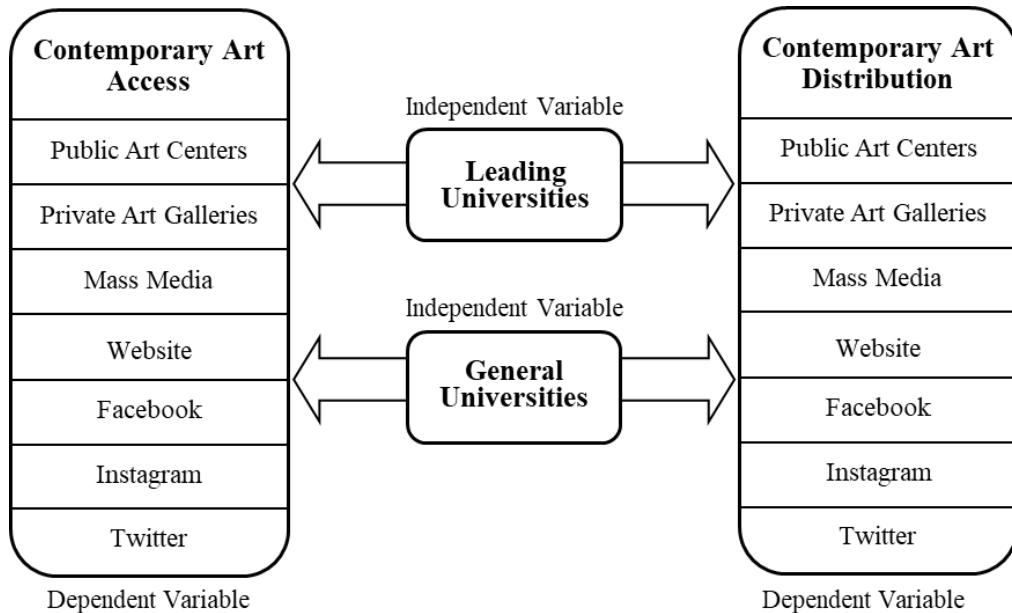


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Research question I: Contemporary art access channels

An independent sample T-Test was performed to compare the responses to contemporary art access channels including public museums, private galleries, mass media, website, and social media consisting of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter between the leading and general art universities in the Bangkok metropolitan area.

Public Art Centers: there was a significant difference in general university students' attitudes toward public art centers ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .961$) over the leading universities ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.997$), $t(448) = -3.360$, $p = 0.001$). The results suggested that two different groups of participants had an effect on attitudes toward contemporary art access channels. General university students favored public art centers more than the top ten university students (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Private galleries: the results indicated that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of respondents toward private galleries (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Mass media: the results suggested that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of participants toward mass media (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Website: the results indicated that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of respondents toward website (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Facebook: the results suggested that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of participants toward Facebook (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Instagram: the results indicated that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of respondents toward Instagram (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Twitter: the results suggested that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of participants toward Twitter (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Research question II: Contemporary art distribution channels

An independent sample T-Test was performed to compare the responses to contemporary art distribution channels including public museums, private galleries, mass media, website, and social media consisting of

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter between the leading and general art universities in the Bangkok metropolitan area.

Public Art Centers: results indicated a significant difference in general university students' attitudes toward public art centers ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.154$) over the leading universities ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.356$), $t(425.449) = -3.787$, $p = 0.000$). The results suggested that two different groups of respondents had an effect on attitudes toward contemporary art distribution channels. General university students chose public art centers more than the leading university students (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Private galleries: there was a significant difference in general university students' attitudes toward private galleries ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.285$) over the leading

universities ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.269$), $t(448) = -4.724$, $p = 0.000$). The results indicated that two different groups of participants had an effect on attitudes toward contemporary art distribution channels. General university students favored private galleries more than the leading university students (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Mass media: results indicated a significant effect in general university students' attitudes toward mass media ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.297$) over the leading universities ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.262$), $t(448) = -4.4050$, $p = 0.000$). The results suggested that two different groups of respondents had an effect on attitudes toward contemporary art distribution channels. General university students preferred mass media more than the leading university students (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Table 1 Summary of the effects of attitudes toward contemporary art access channels

Contemporary art access channels		
	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Public Art Centers	-3.360	0.001**
Private Galleries	-1.926	0.055
Mass Media	-0.514	0.607
Website	0.678	0.498
Facebook	-1.353	0.177
Instagram	0.480	0.631
Twitter	0.598	0.550

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

** The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$).

Table 2 Summary of the effects of attitudes toward contemporary art distribution channels

Contemporary art distribution channels		
	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Public Art Centers	-3.787	0.000**
Private Galleries	-4.724	0.000**
Mass Media	-4.050	0.000**
Website	-0.973	0.331
Facebook	-3.893	0.000**
Instagram	0.427	0.670
Twitter	0.247	0.805

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

** The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$).

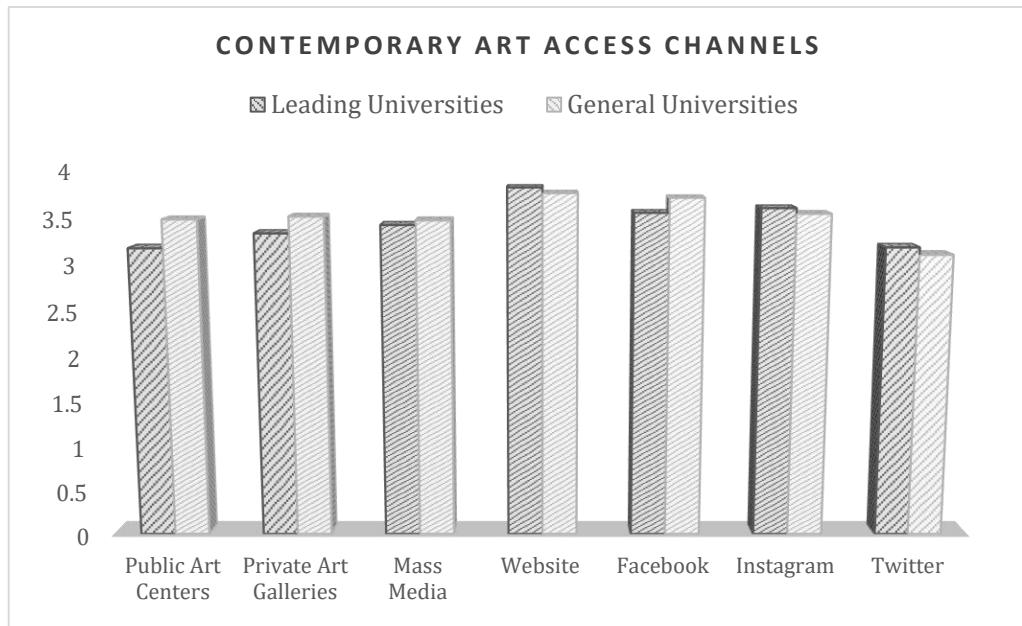


Figure 2 The mean score of the preferences toward contemporary art access channels.

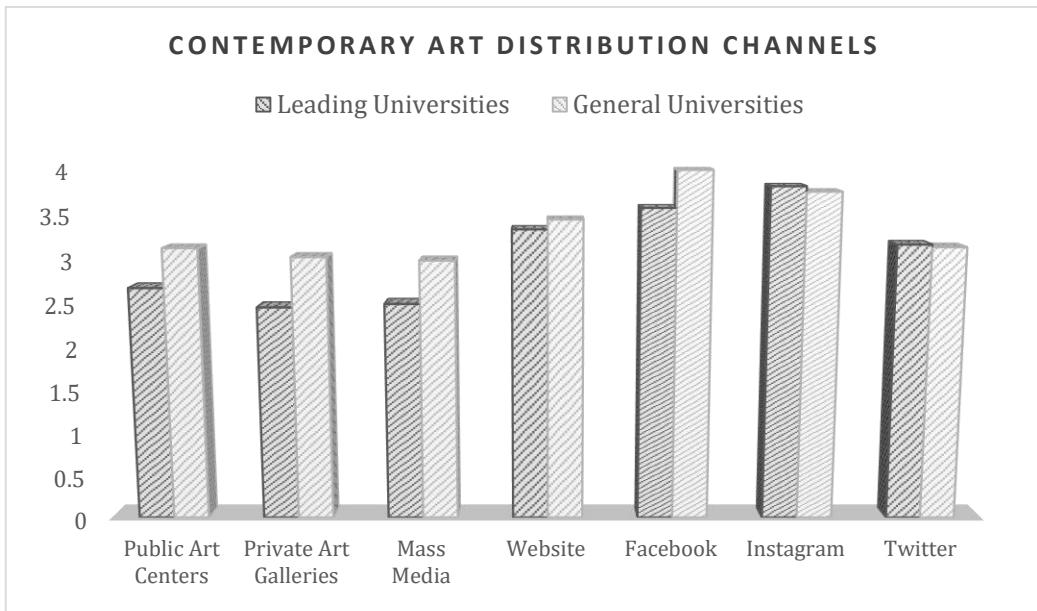


Figure 3 The mean score of the preferences toward contemporary art distribution channels

Website: the results indicated that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of respondents toward website (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Facebook: there was a significant difference in general university students' attitudes toward Facebook ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.040$) over the leading universities ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.230$), $t(424.240) = -3.893$, $p = 0.000$). The results indicated that two different groups of participants had an effect on attitudes toward

contemporary art distribution channels. General university students favored Facebook more than the leading university students (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Instagram: the results indicated that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of respondents toward Instagram (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Twitter: the results indicated that there was no significant difference in attitude between the two groups of respondents toward Twitter (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that students from general universities demonstrated significantly greater preferences for traditional distribution channels such as public art centers, private galleries, mass media, and Facebook, while students from top-ranking universities showed less reliance on these outlets. One possible explanation is that students in general universities may have fewer institutional opportunities or professional networks, prompting them to seek visibility through more publicly accessible and familiar channels. In contrast, students from top universities may already benefit from stronger academic support systems, established exhibitions, or faculty-led showcases, reducing their need to depend on traditional public venues.

These differences also reflect broader digital and cultural divides in the way art is approached within educational contexts. Although access to contemporary art was found to be relatively equal across both groups, the disparities in distribution preferences underscore distinct institutional influences on students' behavior. This finding aligns with Kelomees (2019) and Blume (2017), who emphasized the shift towards online and decentralized platforms in the post-internet era. However, the continued reliance on public art centers and mass media by general university students suggests that traditional forms of dissemination remain relevant, particularly for those outside elite academic circles.

Furthermore, the significant difference in the use of Facebook, as opposed to other platforms like Instagram and Twitter, may indicate a demographic-specific pattern of use in Thailand's art student population. While prior research (e.g., Suess, 2018; Greenwood et al., 2016) has emphasized Instagram as a key platform for art engagement, the results here suggest that Facebook may still hold greater value for certain groups, warranting further investigation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several practical implications and directions for future research emerge. First, art educators and administrators should recognize the unequal distribution of institutional support and actively promote broader opportunities for students in general universities to engage with both traditional and digital exhibition platforms. Enhancing partnerships

with galleries, curators, and online art spaces could help bridge the visibility gap for emerging artists.

Second, given the prominent role of Facebook in this study, future research should explore the platform-specific behaviors and motivations of undergraduate students when exhibiting art online. Qualitative studies such as interviews or digital ethnography may provide deeper insights into the strategies students employ and the effectiveness of each platform.

Finally, expanding the sample beyond undergraduate art students to include young professional artists, independent designers, or regional institutions across Thailand would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary art access and distribution operate in a wider social and cultural context.

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Conflict of Interest

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