

HUMAN BEHAVIOR, DEVELOPMENT and SOCIETY

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The journal has the following objectives:

- a). To stimulate the creation and synthesis of beneficial information, as well as its broad dissemination, especially in the varied fields of the humanities and social sciences,
- b). To foster a deeper understanding regarding the impact of business policies and practices on society, and
- c). To promote the adoption of best practices in communities through education, and to aid in the resolution of community issues for the betterment of society; this represents the development aspect referred to in its name.

Editorial Objectives

The editorial objectives are to advance knowledge through use of classical—or the creation of innovative—methods of investigation, and to foster the examination of cross-cultural issues to increase mutual understandings among diverse social groups. Encouraging cooperative studies and scholarly exchange across borders is a key aim, especially when these may have practical applications within the Southeast Asian region. The application of theoretical considerations to organizations, fields, and communities is also an outcome that is sought.

Journal Positioning

The journal is broadly based and has the potential to impact thinking and practices across a range of subject areas, dealing with substantive issues that arise in both developing and developed countries. It will likely appeal to readers with a broad appreciation of the social issues facing organizations, communities, and governments operating under varied challenges and constraints. Its contents are meant to appeal to both the academic community and practitioners in numerous areas of interest.

The positioning of the journal means that a variety of topics is covered in most issues. These, in turn, differ in their philosophical content, academic appeal, and practical implications.

Appropriate Content

The journal covers a broad spectrum of topics. These include, but are not limited to, anthropology, allied health focused on community issues and health education, education from the primary to the tertiary levels, literature, language use and acquisition, business, management, finance, geography, psychology, social sciences, philosophy, and theology. Well-executed studies that address interesting and significant topics in the areas mentioned above are particularly welcomed. All articles accepted should make significant contributions to understanding and add to the corpus of knowledge in their respective fields.

The following constitutes a partial list of topics that are considered potentially suitable for publication:

1. Studies dealing with business fields: accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, organizational behavior; this includes topics such as enhancing job satisfaction, creating a positive work environment, or developing personal resilience.
2. Research about learning and teaching at all age and ability levels; topics include instructional methods, interventions, assessment, policies, and strategies, along with their impact on educational development.
3. Innovative and cost-effective approaches to health care, including promoting positive health outcomes in communities, creatively addressing addictive behavior, and the impact of health care interventions and policies.
4. Applied linguistic or linguistic studies that examine issues related to communication, language pedagogy and use, as well as theories and meaning of language.
5. Other humanities and social science areas such as anthropology, cross-cultural studies, and religious or biblical issues that explore historical, philosophical, or sociological topics in order to lead to a better understanding within societies.

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From the Editor

Human Behavior, Development and Society (HBDS) is an international, open-access, and interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal published three issues a year by Asia-Pacific International University (AIU). *HBDS* publishes academic research articles in the humanities, social sciences, education, business administration, religion, health care education, public administration, development, tourism, and other social sciences areas that contribute to the development of concepts, theories, as well as new knowledge for developing the community and society. The journal's scope is to advance knowledge through use of classical methods of investigation and to foster the examination of cross-cultural issues that increase mutual understanding among diverse social groups within the international community, with a particular emphasis on Southeast Asia.

This is the last issue of *Human Behavior, Development and Society (HBDS)* for 2025. For this issue, there are 15 articles, 11 of which were written by researchers external to the university, and four were authored by AIU researchers. We are delighted to see reports and findings from various disciplines, including arts, business, education, and health care. Most articles in this issue reflect studies conducted in ASEAN contexts, including Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, as well as articles from China. We hope that this issue of *HBDS* will contribute to the development of society and serve as a source of information for various academic fields and research projects.

We would like to invite readers to publish your valuable papers with us. All articles in the journal are indexed by the Thai-Journal Citation Index Centre (TCI), ASEAN Citation Index (ACI), and the EBSCO database. More information may be found on our website, <https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/hbds>. We would also appreciate comments or suggestions from you to help us improve the journal. Finally, we appreciate the hard work of authors, reviewers, editorial board members, executive board members, and journal staff members who have contributed to making this achievement a reality.

Assistant Professor Dr. Damrong Sattayawaksakul, Editor
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The Impact of Social Media Usage on Branding: The Perspective of Thai Social Media Users

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Paper Type: Original Research

Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the influence of social media usage on fundamental branding impacts, i.e., Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty. Its objectives included both direct and indirect effects of social media usage on the above variables. Ultimately, this study aimed to produce empirically based information on how organizations can strategically use social media sites to increase brand capital in the digital age.

Introduction/Background: As the world has become increasingly digitalized, social media websites have emerged as important tools for organizational strategy, allowing consumer interaction, facilitating brand recognition, and building consumer loyalty. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) offer brands immense opportunities for interacting with target markets and constructing brand communities. But whereas there is broad recognition of the strategic importance of social media in modern marketing theory, the specific causal mechanisms by which social media usage affects important metrics like brand awareness and loyalty are not well understood. This study addresses this gap in the literature by rigorously examining the effect of social media usage on fundamental branding constructs and consequent consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Methodology: A quantitative research design was employed in this study, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to rigorously test hypothesized relations among Social Media Usage (SMU) and specified brand-related outcomes. Data were collected from a sample of 300 Thai social media users recruited through a non-probability convenience sampling technique. A carefully crafted web-based questionnaire survey was employed to determine respondents' attitudes regarding SMU, consumer engagement, brand reputation, brand awareness, and brand loyalty factors. Data thus gathered were subsequently readied for SEM to analyze the estimated direct and indirect effects hypothesized in the theory framework and thereby evaluate how social media usage translated to the brand's performance indicators.

Findings: Statistical analysis revealed strong empirical evidence regarding the effects of social media usage. Findings indicate that SMU positively and significantly affected consumer engagement, brand reputation, and brand image. These, in turn, were revealed to positively affect brand loyalty. Specifically, path analysis indicated that social media behavior strongly predicted increases in brand awareness ($\beta = .70, p < .01$) and improvements in a brand image ($\beta = .33, p < .01$). Moreover, consumer engagement, found to be influenced by social media usage, was also identified as a mediating variable that significantly influenced the relationship between SMU and brand loyalty. Additionally, the analysis confirmed brand image and brand awareness as key antecedents, positively predicting brand loyalty. The findings collectively supported the central role of strategically using social media in building brand visibility, creating favorable brand perception, and ultimately inducing consumer loyalty.

Contribution/Impact on Society: The current research is an essential contribution to the literature in the area of social media marketing, since it presents robust empirical evidence for the direct and indirect effects brought about by social media usage on significant brand-related consequences. The

findings specifically elucidated the role of consumer engagement as a mediator in the process towards stronger brand loyalty. Moreover, the study prescribes and examines a model charting the nomological network among SMUs, brand awareness, brand image, consumer interaction, and brand loyalty. The results hold practical importance to marketing managers and firms dedicated to refining and optimizing their social media campaigns to improve branding efficiency and ensure competitive advantage in contemporary marketplaces.

Recommendations: Empirical findings suggest that firms should invest in engaging social media content designed to stimulate active user interaction, thereby enhancing brand visibility and positive perceptions. Maintaining consistent brand messaging across digital touchpoints and strategically leveraging user-generated content is crucial for fostering authenticity and trust. Furthermore, social media campaigns should be planned to simultaneously improve both brand awareness and consumer engagement, which are essential antecedents for building sustainable brand loyalty.

Limitations of the Study: This research had certain built-in limitations worth mentioning. First, reliance on self-reporting enables response biases, and the application of a non-probability convenience sampling process may constrain the generalizability (external validity) of the outcome outside of the selected sample that was surveyed. Furthermore, the sample was confined to active social media users and so may not be representative of the attitudes or behaviors of the general consumer populace. Finally, the application of a cross-sectional research design inevitably precludes firm causal connections between the variables of interest; reported associations should accordingly be viewed circumspectly in causal terms.

Future Research: Acknowledging current limitations, future research directions include: 1) Implementing longitudinal studies to examine temporal processes and potential causal effects of social media engagement on brand loyalty development over time; 2) Comparing the heterogeneous impacts of different social media platform types (e.g., Instagram vs. Twitter) on branding metrics like awareness, image, and loyalty; 3) Using qualitative techniques (e.g., interviews, focus groups) to gain deeper understanding of subjective consumer experiences and motivations involved in social media engagement and loyalty formation.

Keywords: *Social media usage, consumer engagement, branding*

Introduction

In today's contemporary era of technological advancements, social media has proven to be one of the strongest weapons for building ties with consumers and a business's brand image. With an adequate number of online users on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, businesses are incorporating social media as a platform for marketing and advertising, and even as a branding technique. Social media platforms offer brands a precious opportunity to speak with their audiences directly and meaningfully, get feedback, and develop a narrative for one's brand. Therefore, integrating social media as a component of branding strategy has become a significant focus.

Social Media Usage (SMU) enables companies to promote their goods, post content, and engage with customers in ways that traditional advertising methods cannot. Through regular promotional posts and interactive campaigns, companies can raise their profile, create consumer engagement, and influence how they are perceived. This is particularly critical in today's competitive business environment, where brand awareness (BA) and brand image (BI) can directly affect a firm's market position and consumer loyalty. Social media's capacity to facilitate instant consumer interactions has led many to believe that a successful social media presence can directly contribute to developing brand loyalty (BL) and fostering a positive brand image in the long term.

Brand Awareness refers to the ability of consumers to recall or recognize a brand, and it is typically considered to be a precursor to brand loyalty. Previous research has highlighted the crucial role of brand awareness in forming the foundation for future consumer decisions and behavior (Keller, 2003). An effective social media strategy, with targeted content and consistent consumer

interaction, can significantly improve brand awareness among potential consumers (Tyrväinen et al., 2023).

Brand Image is also a crucial aspect of branding, involving consumers' connections and perceptions of a brand. Social media makes it easier to establish a brand image using visual content, customer recommendations, and storytelling platforms. The continuous flow of content enables brands to craft a picture that resonates with consumers and builds emotional connections (Aaker, 1996). Social media campaigns can influence whether a brand is seen as trustworthy, innovative, or socially responsible, thereby becoming a powerful tool for brand positioning.

The second significant characteristic is consumer engagement (CE), or the level of involvement, interaction, and emotional attachment that a consumer displays towards a brand. The proliferation of social media has made it convenient to achieve greater consumer engagement, which has been shown to have a positive influence on both brand awareness and brand image (Barger et al., 2016). Greater levels of engagement, such as liking, commenting, or sharing a brand post, result in an increased emotional connection to the brand and more customer loyalty (Dessart et al., 2015).

Furthermore, brand loyalty (BL), or the habit of consumers repeatedly buying a brand's products and recommending them to others, is one of the most vital objectives of branding. Empirical research has indicated that brand image and awareness, cemented by customer interaction, highly enhance brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). As individuals increasingly utilize social media to find and engage with brands, those capable of using the platform effectively can potentially develop long-term loyalty and trust among their followers.

The relationships between the variables of social media usage, brand awareness, brand image, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty were the focus of this research. Through a study of how social media usage affects brand awareness and image, and how these affect consumer engagement and loyalty, this study aimed to create a comprehensive picture of the role of social media in contemporary branding practices.

The present study examined the indirect effects of social media usage on brand loyalty, with consumer interaction and brand consideration serving as mediators. The outcomes of this study may be extremely valuable to marketers seeking to optimize their social media efforts to build more effective brands and foster stronger consumer commitment.

Research Objectives

To investigate the influence of social media usage (SMU) on consumer engagement, brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty.

Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine the impact of social media usage on branding, focusing on the most critical variables, including consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), and brand loyalty (BL). The primary objective of this review was to examine the interrelation between these variables and describe the pivotal role that social media plays in shaping brand image and customer loyalty.

Social Media's Impact on Brand Performance

Social media has fundamentally reshaped brand strategy, shifting from one-way corporate messaging to a dynamic, interactive environment where consumers and brands co-create value (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A review of academic literature reveals that specific social media factors drive a sequence of critical brand outcomes, from initial awareness to long-term loyalty.

Initially, brand awareness is amplified through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and the creation of "viral" content that is emotionally evocative or highly useful, motivating users to share it widely (Berger & Milkman, 2012). This visibility then evolves into brand engagement, a deeper connection defined by consumers' active participation (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Engagement is primarily fostered through a brand's strategic, high-quality content, and, crucially, its responsive two-

way communication, which makes consumers feel heard and valued (Gummerus et al., 2012). Furthermore, user-generated content has emerged as a powerful factor, significantly influencing brand perceptions by providing authentic social proof (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

These interactions directly shape brand image. While brands use social platforms to strategically craft narratives about their identity (Gensler et al. 2013), their image is also heavily influenced by consumer conversations, which can either enhance reputation or rapidly escalate into a public relations crisis if it is negative (Pfeffer et al., 2014).

Ultimately, sustained positive interaction on social media cultivates brand loyalty. This is achieved by building online brand communities that foster a sense of belonging and trust (Laroche et al., 2013) and by providing effective social customer care, which fortifies customer relationships and satisfaction (van Asperen et al., 2018). The literature demonstrates a clear progression, where strategic social media activities generate awareness and engagement, which in turn shape a favorable brand image and cultivate lasting consumer loyalty.

Social Media Usage and Consumer Engagement (CE)

Consumer engagement (CE) refers to the degree of interaction, participation, and emotional connection that customers have with a brand. It is perhaps the most sought-after outcome of social media usage. Social media websites facilitate two-way communication, which permits instant communication and the formation of emotional bonds between consumers and brands.

Dessart et al. (2015) also found that consumer involvement on social web pages was correlated with higher brand loyalty and good brand attitudes. Consumer participation tends to lead to stronger brand advocacy, where consumers endorse the brand to their friends and other people within their social circle (Barger et al., 2016).

Calder et al. (2009) contended that social media interaction has affective and cognitive responses, thus supplementing the whole consumer process. Positive brand interaction will most likely stimulate the probability of repeat purchasing and long-term brand choice. Negative interaction is likely to result in disengagement because of brands' need to protect their social media reputation.

In summary, a survey of the literature highlights social media's primary role in influencing consumer behavior, and by extension, brand loyalty. Firms strategically utilize social media to foster maximal consumer contributions and enhance brand performance.

Social Media Usage and Brand Awareness (BA)

Brand awareness is the foundation of branding, which refers to the degree to which customers may remember or recognize a brand. Brand awareness has been cited by Keller (2003) as an important part of the customer decision-making process, one of the key ingredients that lead to brand loyalty.

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter enable brands to engage with consumers through targeted posts, sponsored posts, and consumer-generated content; such engagement leads to brand recall and visibility. For example, Setiawan et al. (2024) illustrated how reflective and regular posting on social media had a positive influence on brand awareness, and how visual posts and engagement campaigns were particularly effective at this activity. Likewise, Barger et al. (2016) validated the effectiveness of social media campaigns—competitions, contests, and influencer collaboration—to strengthen brand awareness by appealing to larger audience groups.

Evidence indicates that widespread coverage on social media is an awareness driver. Through specific messaging and regular promotions, brands can successfully increase visibility and reinforce their association with consumers, thereby establishing platforms for long-term brand equity.

Social Media Usage and Brand Image (BI)

Brand image is the sum of consumers' perceptions and associations regarding a brand, driven by marketing communications and consumer experience. Social media is central to the creation and

maintenance of brand image because it can convey information about the personality, values, and market positioning of a brand.

Social media allows brands not only to sell their goods but also to transfer their culture, ethos, and values. Repetitive messaging, as argued by Aaker (1996), reinforces brand image since such messaging is greatly encouraged on social media websites. The very graphic nature of social media—gradients ranging from images to videos, infographics, and other multimedia content—permits the development of brand perceptions by consumers. Hutter et al.'s (2013) research established that the core role of social media, particularly through platforms like customer feedback and favorable user-generated content, is to solidify positive brand associations.

The tone and content conveyed by social media also have a profound effect on brand image. Bagozzi et al. (2017) confirmed that brands endowed with authenticity, trustworthiness, and social responsibility conveyed through their social media platforms tend to build positive brand images. Conversely, incongruent or poorly designed social media approaches can destroy brand image and result in consumer distrust or perplexity. These findings emphasize the importance of strategic planning and meticulous execution in leveraging social media to establish a brand image.

In general, social media is a powerful medium for constructing brand image by allowing brands to project their identity and values authentically. Through effective and consistent communication, brands can reaffirm consumer notions and create long-term relationships, untainted by the pitfalls of poor communication tactics.

Social Media Usage and Brand Loyalty (BL)

Brand loyalty (BL) is the extent to which customers are involved and committed to a brand, typically indicated by repeated purchasing and favorable word-of-mouth comments to others. Social media usage has emerged as a major driver of brand loyalty, as it generates continuous interaction between consumers and brands.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2001) research demonstrated that brand awareness and brand image make significant contributions to brand loyalty. Brand sites, to the extent that they can ensure ongoing conversations, play a key role in reminding viewers of a brand's ideal attributes, thereby developing customer loyalty. Brands may remain in customers' minds if they are repeatedly reminded of their value, which may help to strengthen long-term loyalty. Moreover, social media enables brands to make their loyal customers feel special by providing them with personalized discounts, special content, and special offers. Zoubi and Al-Harazneh (2019) mentioned that a brand's valued customers were likely to display loyalty-driven behaviors such as repeat purchases and word-of-mouth promotion on social media.

Thus, consumer engagement is a powerful mediating variable linking social media usage and brand loyalty. Empirical observations have demonstrated that active social media engagement initiates trust and intensifies affective relationships between brands and consumers, both of which are powerful drivers of loyalty (Bagozzi et al., 2017). This emphasizes the need for brands to utilize strategies that focus on high-frequency engagement on social media platforms. By managing social media in an organized manner to connect and engage consumers, brands can establish loyalty and attain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Indirect Effects of Social Media Usage on Brand Loyalty

Recent research has focused on the indirect effects of social media usage on brand loyalty, examining its impact on brand awareness and customer interaction. For instance, Ahmed et al. (2019) established that social media usage indirectly increased brand loyalty by simultaneously creating brand awareness and customer interaction. They concluded that social media efforts aimed at building awareness and eliciting engagement led to increased brand loyalty, and they suggested the importance of direct and indirect channels in this dynamic.

Similarly, Jibril et al. (2019) placed significance on the mediating role of consumer interaction in the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty. Consumers who were not only familiar

with a brand's products and values but also interacted with the brand were the most likely to form intimate emotional connections and higher loyalty levels. This points the way toward synergistic brand awareness initiatives and initiatives toward creating vital consumer interactions.

The academic literature emphasizes the significant role of social media in generating brand awareness, enhancing brand image, fostering consumer engagement, and promoting brand loyalty. Empirical research has consistently shown that social media usage not only generates brand awareness and image, but also enables consumer interaction, a crucial mediator to brand loyalty reinforcement. Social media has effects that are more than just immediate and direct effects, such as its role in reinforcing long-term relationships between consumers and brands. Such long-term interactions are also a primary component in forming brand loyalty, thereby facilitating long-term brand success and competitiveness in the market.

Typically, the indirect effects of social media on brand loyalty via brand awareness and customer interaction are a crucial research issue. By utilizing social media in strategic ways to formulate these intermediate constructs, brands indirectly enhance customer-company relationships and receive long-term competitive benefits.

Conceptual Research Framework

The primary aim of this research was to examine the impact of social media usage (SMU) on key branding metrics, including consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), and brand loyalty (BL). Through examinations of the inter-relationships among these variables, the study aimed to gain a clearer view of how social media ignites the facilitation of brand-related outcomes.

This study investigated the impact of Social Media Usage (SMU) on Brand Loyalty (BL), exploring the mediating roles of Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), and Brand Image (BI). The independent variable, SMU, encompassed brand activities on social media platforms, such as content posting and marketing efforts aimed at increasing visibility and interaction. The mediating variables represented key consumer responses: CE measured the intensity of consumer interaction with the brand's social media presence (e.g., likes, shares, comments); BA reflected the extent of consumer recall and recognition of the brand; and BI captured the perceptions and associations consumers held about the brand, including trust and emotional appeal. Finally, the dependent variable, BL, signified the degree of consumer commitment and attachment, often demonstrated through repeat purchases and positive recommendations, serving as a key indicator of long-term brand success.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed to guide this research:

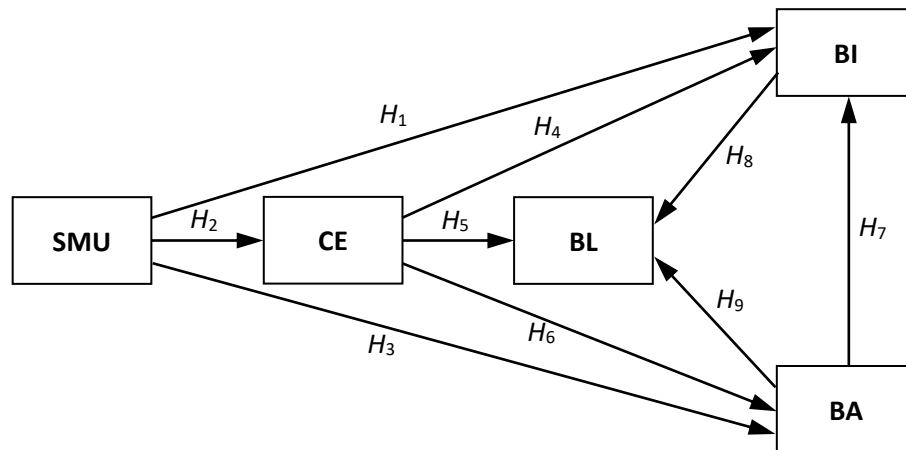
- H*₁: Social media usage (SMU) has a positive direct effect on Brand Image (BI).
- H*₂: Social media usage (SMU) has a positive direct effect on Consumer Engagement (CE).
- H*₃: Social media usage (SMU) has a positive direct effect on Brand Awareness (BA).
- H*₄: Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive effect on Brand Image (BI).
- H*₅: Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H*₆: Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive effect on Brand Awareness (BA).
- H*₇: Brand Awareness (BA) has a positive effect on Brand Image (BI).
- H*₈: Brand Image (BI) has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H*₉: Brand Awareness (BA) has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty (BL).

Conceptual Framework Representation:

The conceptual framework graphically indicates the direction of influence among the variables. Social media usage (SMU) was the independent variable, with direct effects on the mediating variables—Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), and Brand Image (BI). These mediating variables influence the dependent variable, Brand Loyalty (BL), either directly or indirectly. The model highlighted the interdependence between these constructs and suggested the pivotal role of social media in shaping brand-related outcomes.

In short, the purpose of this research was to enhance theoretical understanding of how the use of social media influences concepts of branding. Through studying both direct and indirect processes, this research addressed common academic and business debates about Internet marketing strategies and their implications for brand equity and customer response. The conceptual research framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework Diagram*



Research Methodology

The research paradigm employed in this study centered on empirically verifying the hypotheses regarding how social media usage (SMU) affects brand performance in terms of brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), consumer engagement (CE), and brand loyalty (BL). A quantitative approach was employed based on survey data. This method included research design, population, sampling technique, data collection methods, and data analysis methods.

Research Design

This research followed a quantitative approach to investigate the influence of social media engagement on branding results. A cross-sectional design was used in which data were gathered at a single moment from a sample of respondents that sufficiently represented a particular population (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This particular design is suitable for examining relationships among variables in non-experimental contexts and is commonly used for branding and marketing studies (Malhotra et al., 2017). The study sought to establish both the direct and indirect influences of social media usage on the aforementioned branding constructs.

Population and Sampling

The scope of this research included Thai social media users who engage with brands regularly on all social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok. It was expected that these users had some degree of awareness of brands that use social media as part of their marketing mix.

Determination of the sample size was informed by Hair et al.'s guidelines (2020) for structural equation modeling (SEM) studies, which suggest at least 200 to 300 respondents for moderately complex models and high statistical power. Thus, the researcher aimed for about 300 respondents to provide robust results. A convenience sampling method was used to recruit respondents due to its ease, cost-effectiveness, and suitability for marketing research (Saunders et al., 2016). The research instrument was administered online via social media platforms and email invitations to potential participants who fulfilled the inclusion criterion of being active social media users.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected via a structured online survey designed to assess perceptions related to Social Media Usage (SMU; frequency/nature of interactions), Consumer Engagement (CE; active participation), Brand Awareness (BA; recognition/recall), Brand Image (BI; perceived traits/personality), and Brand Loyalty (BL; behavioral/attitudinal intent). Measurement primarily utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), consistent with standard marketing research practices for reliability and usability (Malhotra et al., 2017).

The questionnaire's content validity was evaluated by three experts with expertise in areas of business administration, management, and business computing, using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index, adhering to Hambleton's (1984) criterion ($IOC > .60$). All items surpassed this threshold. Following revision based on expert feedback, the instrument underwent a pilot test (tryout) with 30 non-sample Thai online consumers.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Alpha values for social media usage (SMU), consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), and brand loyalty (BL) were .887, .787, .850, .785 and .960, respectively. All coefficients exceeded the .70 threshold (Cronbach, 1951), indicating high reliability and suitability for main data collection.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a sophisticated statistical technique chosen for its capacity to examine complex interrelationships among both observed and latent variables (Byrne, 2016). SEM was particularly well-suited for this research study as it facilitated the simultaneous assessment of direct and indirect pathways, making it ideal for testing the proposed theoretical framework. The core of the analysis involved testing the structural model to evaluate the hypothesized relationships. Specifically, this included examining the direct effects of Social Media Usage (SMU) on Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), Consumer Engagement (CE), and Brand Loyalty (BL). Furthermore, the indirect effects of SMU on BL were investigated as mediated by the intervening variables of BA, BI, and CE.

A critical step in this process was the evaluation of the model's fit to the data, which was assessed using several standard fit indices. Acceptable model fit was determined based on established criteria: a non-significant Chi-square (χ^2) probability level ($p > .05$); Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) values exceeding .90; and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value below .08, with values under .05 indicating a particularly close fit (Hair et al., 2010).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlational Analysis

The demographic profile of the respondents revealed that the majority were female (61.7%), with ages predominantly ranging between 45–54 years (22.3%). Additionally, the frequency of social media usage was reported to be 1–2 hours per day (48.0%), and Facebook emerged as the most frequently used social media platform (34.0%). These descriptive statistics provide a foundational understanding of the sample characteristics and their social media usage patterns.

A correlational analysis demonstrated significant relationships among the study variables. Social Media Usage (SMU) exhibited positive correlations with Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Image (BI), Brand Awareness (BA), and Brand Loyalty (BL), with correlation coefficients of .598, .666, .829, and .652, respectively. Similarly, CE was positively correlated with BI, BA, and BL with correlation coefficients of .609, .637, and .615, respectively. Brand Image showed strong positive correlations with BA and BL, with correlation coefficients of .655 and .760, respectively. Furthermore, BA was positively correlated with BL, with a correlation coefficient of .654.

All observed relationships among the variables were statistically significant at the .01 level ($p < .01$), indicating robust associations within the proposed model. The correlations among the variables are summarized in Table 1, providing empirical support for the hypothesized relationships, and underscoring the interconnected nature of the constructs under investigation.

These findings highlight social media's critical role as a driver of key branding outcomes and the importance of mediating factors such as Consumer Engagement, Brand Image, and Brand Awareness in fostering Brand Loyalty. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying digital marketing strategies and their impact on consumer-brand relationships.

Table 1 *Correlation among Variables in the Proposed Model*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>CE</i>	<i>BI</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>BL</i>
Social media usage (SMU)	3.72	.86	.598**	.666**	.829**	.652**
Consumer Engagement (CE)	3.69	.80	-	.609**	.637**	.615**
Brand Image (BI)	3.72	.77		-	.655**	.760**
Brand Awareness (BA)	3.67	.83			-	.654**
Brand Loyalty (BL)	3.68	.79				-

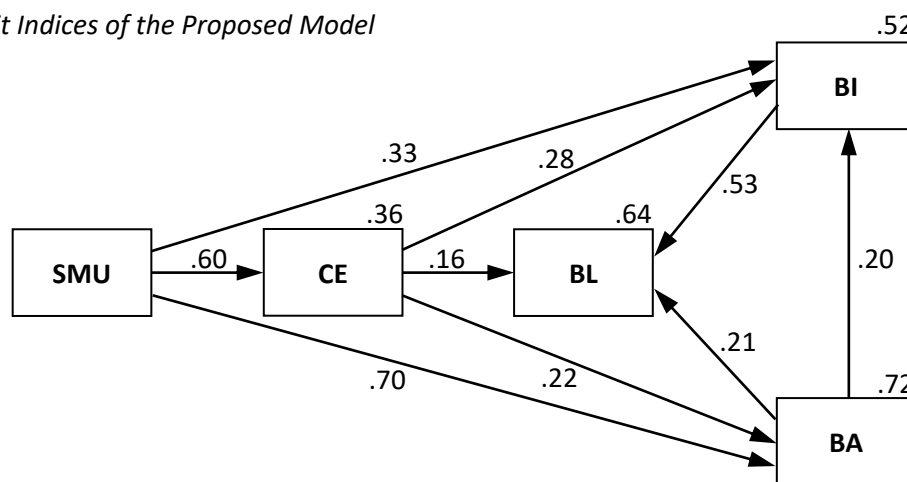
Note. ** $p < .01$

Analysis of the Relationships Among Social Media Usage (SMU), Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL)

The relationships among Social Media Usage (SMU), Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL) were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This approach was employed to test both the direct and indirect effects among the variables, as hypothesized in the study. The results of the analysis encompassed model fit indices, direct effects, indirect effects, and hypothesis testing.

The SEM analysis confirmed a strong fit between the proposed theoretical model and the collected data. Key fit indices supported this conclusion: the Chi-square test was non-significant ($\chi^2 = 3.200$, $df = 1$, $p = .074$), but the relative Chi-square was acceptable ($\chi^2/df = 3.200$), falling within the recommended threshold of less than 5.0 (Wheaton et al., 1977) and approaching the stricter criterion of 3.0 (Kline, 2016). Both the GFI (.996) and CFI (.998) indicated excellent fit by exceeding the .90 threshold for acceptable fit (Hair et al., 2019) and the more stringent .95 threshold for excellent fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Additionally, the RMSEA (.086) suggested a reasonable fit, as it was below the .10 ceiling for poor fit, and close to the .08 cutoff for acceptability (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; MacCallum et al., 1996). As shown in Figure 2 and Table 2, these indices collectively demonstrated the model's appropriateness for representing the observed data. This robust fit provided a valid basis for interpreting the hypothesized direct and indirect effects and testing the study's hypotheses, thus enhancing the reliability of the findings derived from the model.

Figure 2 *Fit Indices of the Proposed Model*



Chi-Square = 3.200, $df = 1$, $p = .074$
 CMIN/DF = 3.200, GFI = .996, CFI = .998, RMSEA = .086

Table 2 *Summary of Model Fit Indices*

Fit Index	Calculated Value	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-square (χ^2)	3.200 ($df=1$, $p=.074$)	$p > .05$	Acceptable Fit
Relative Chi-square (χ^2/df)	3.200	< 5.00	Acceptable Fit
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	.996	$> .90$	Excellent Fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	.998	$> .90$	Excellent Fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	.086	$< .08$ (Reasonable Fit)	Acceptable Fit

The structural model was analyzed to examine the direct relationships between social media usage (SMU) and the other variables under investigation. The findings provide robust support for the majority of the hypotheses related to direct effects, as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 *Results of Hypothesis Testing*

Hypothesis	Path	Results		
		β	t	p
H_1	Social media usage (SMU) $\rightarrow$ BI	.33	4.552**	.000
H_2	Social media usage (SMU) $\rightarrow$ CE	.60	12.905**	.000
H_3	Social media usage (SMU) $\rightarrow$ BA	.70	18.244**	.000
H_4	Consumer Engagement (CE) $\rightarrow$ Brand Image (BI)	.28	5.408**	.000
H_5	Consumer Engagement (CE) $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty (BL)	.16	3.423**	.000
H_6	Consumer Engagement (CE) $\rightarrow$ Brand Awareness (BA)	.22	5.713**	.000
H_7	Brand Awareness (BA) $\rightarrow$ Brand Image (BI)	.20	2.674**	.007
H_8	Brand Image (BI) $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty (BL)	.53	10.741**	.000
H_9	Brand Awareness (BA) $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty (BL)	.21	4.084**	.000

Note. ** $p < .01$

In addition to examining direct effects, the indirect effects of social media usage on brand loyalty were also explored through mediating variables such as consumer engagement, brand awareness, and brand image. The results of SEM analysis revealed the total, direct, and indirect effects of these relationships, as summarized in Table 4. These findings underscored the mediating roles of Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, and Brand Image in amplifying the impact of Social Media Usage on Brand Loyalty.

Table 4 *Effect of Variables in the Proposed Model*

Variables	CE			BI			BA			BL		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
SMU	.60	-	.60	.33	-	.33	.70	-	.70	-	-	.62
CE				.28	.04	.32	.22	-	.22	.16	.22	.38
BI							.20	-	.20	.53	.00	.53
BA										.21	.11	.32

Note. DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect (β)

The study's results provided strong empirical support for the hypothesized relationships, confirming both the direct and indirect effects of Social Media Usage on Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty. The analysis demonstrated that social media usage exerted a direct influence on consumer engagement, brand awareness, and brand image, while also indirectly impacting brand loyalty through these mediating constructs.

These findings underscored the critical role of social media platforms as strategic tools for building robust brand equity and cultivating enduring consumer loyalty. By elucidating the mechanisms through which social media usage shapes branding outcomes, the study makes a

significant contribution to the expanding body of literature on the role of digital media in modern branding strategies.

Discussion

The results of this research provide valuable information on the influence of Social Media Usage (SMU) on Consumer Engagement (CE) Improvement, Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL). Its findings offer sufficient evidence for the hypotheses to confirm that social media is a very significant platform to influence consumer minds and build long-lasting brand loyalty.

Social Media Usage and Brand Perception (H_1)

The immediate effect of Social Media Engagement on Brand Image lent strong confirmation to Hypothesis 1 (H_1). Social media has a notable influence in establishing the attitudes and perceptions that consumers develop toward a brand. This result is aligned with the pioneering work by Aaker (1996), which underlined that brand image constitutes an essential element of branding, molded through consistent communication and engaging interactions with consumers.

The information posted on social media, such as advertising content, user-generated content, and customer reviews, plays a crucial role in determining a brand's personality and identity. This study demonstrates that if brands effectively utilize social media to convey their underlying values, are socially responsible, and adopt a customer-oriented strategy, they can have a positive impact on consumer attitudes. This supports the assertion put forth by Hutter et al. (2013), who emphasized that social media is an effective platform for building brand reputation, especially if brands engage in sincere and open communication with their followers. By using social media strategically to build trust and credibility, firms can create a good brand image that connects with their consumers.

Social Media Usage and Consumer Engagement (H_2)

These results confirmed the strong impact of Social Media Usage on Consumer Engagement, thus supporting H_2 . The positive direct relationship between SMU and CE was aligned with previous findings (Barger et al., 2016; Dessart et al., 2015). Social media platforms facilitate consumer engagement through features like likes, comments, shares, and user-generated content, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional connection between brands and consumers.

This discovery highlights the need for producing content that is both interactive and engaging, which stimulates consumers and results in active participation. Those brands that produce content intended to invoke meaningful interactions are the most likely to establish deeper consumer-brand relationships, thereby achieving higher levels of engagement. Engaged consumers are more prone to repeat purchases and more likely to recommend the brand to others, thus playing a significant role in building brand loyalty (Calder et al., 2009). As such, stimulating consumer engagement through social media-focused initiatives constitutes a prime strategy for building short-term consumer interactions as well as sustaining brand equity over the long term.

Social Media Usage and Brand Awareness (H_3)

The findings demonstrated that social media usage had a positive influence on Brand Awareness and thus confirmed H_3 . The developed linkage between social media actions such as posting, sharing, and engagement with consumers and increased brand awareness was aligned with current research focused on the role of social media in increasing brand visibility (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter enable companies to engage with a broad audience, thereby enhancing consumer recall and awareness (Tyrväinen et al., 2023). This result underscored the strategic value of maintaining an active and ongoing social media presence, as brand awareness is a key initial phase in the consumer decision-making process (Keller, 2003). Brands that actively utilize social media to interact with customers are more apt to gain top-of-mind awareness that reinforces consumer awareness and improves their influence on purchase decisions.

By placing a focus on social media as a key channel for communication and interaction, brands can create a strong foundation for building lasting relationships with consumers.

Consumer Engagement and Brand Image (H_4) and Brand Awareness (H_6)

The results indicated that Consumer Engagement positively influenced Brand Image and Brand Awareness, thereby supporting H_4 and H_6 . As consumers engage with the social media content of a company, the company's visibility is not only enhanced, but the development of favorable perceptions is also assisted. These findings aligned with previous research by Calder et al. (2009) and Dessart et al. (2015), which demonstrated that user engagement can significantly increase brand awareness and positively shape attitudes toward a brand's attributes. Actively engaged consumers have a higher likelihood of sharing content, hence broadening the brand's reach and solidifying its reputation.

The findings highlighted the paramount importance of consumer engagement as a means of creating brand awareness and shaping brand perception. Consumer engagement with the content of a brand is inherently connected with the formation of favorable brand judgments, which contribute significantly to the formation of brand loyalty. By fostering active engagement and constructive interaction on social media sites, companies can effectively heighten their visibility, establish positive reputations, and set the stage for lasting consumer loyalty.

Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty (H_5 , H_7 – H_9)

The results of this research offer robust empirical evidence for the positive interconnections between Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty (H_7 – H_9). That is, both Brand Image (H_8) and Brand Awareness (H_9) were identified as essential drivers of Brand Loyalty, while Consumer Engagement (H_5) also had a positive effect on Brand Loyalty.

The findings aligned with the foundational research conducted by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), which established BA and BI as major constituents that play a central role in consumer loyalty. The positive effect of BI on BL was consistent with their findings, which shows that brands with strong and positive images tend to form consumer trust and long-term loyalty. BA has also been established as a significant component of BL, as consumers tend to show greater loyalty towards well-known brands (Keller, 2003). This stresses the need for developing and nurturing strong levels of BA as a fundamental cornerstone to establishing long-term consumer relationships.

In addition, the results of the study revealed a positive impact of Consumer Engagement on Brand Loyalty, thereby supporting the hypothesis posited by Dessart et al. (2015) that consumers who are highly engaged are more likely to form emotional connections with a brand. Emotional involvement is critical in validating Brand Loyalty, because customers who interact with a brand frequently on social media will view it as a regular and preferred brand.

In conclusion, the dynamic process of brand awareness, brand image, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty highlights the complexity of branding in the digital era. Through the successful exploitation of these factors, brands can build more meaningful relationships with consumers, thereby fostering long-term loyalty and guaranteeing competitive advantage.

The Unintended Effects of Social Media Usage on Customer Brand Loyalty

These results further confirm that social media use affects brand loyalty indirectly through mediators like brand awareness, brand image, and consumer engagement. This shows that social media affects brand loyalty both directly and indirectly via intermediate variables. These findings agree with those in a study by Jibril et al. (2019), which demonstrated the positive effect of social media usage on brand recall and consumer engagement, and therefore brand loyalty.

The indirect effects highlighted the complexity of branding in the age of social media. Brands that can successfully harness social media platforms can create brand loyalty not just through direct engagement, but by establishing brand awareness and influencing brand attitudes. This indicates the interrelatedness of these branding elements and how they collectively interact to establish long-term relationships with customers.

Conclusion

Seeking to understand the intricate ways social media impacts modern branding, this research investigated how Social Media Usage (SMU) affected Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL). Through a quantitative approach utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), ten hypotheses exploring both direct and indirect relationships were examined. The resulting findings shed considerable light on social media's crucial function in today's branding landscape, identifying it as a valuable asset for building brand equity.

The analysis confirmed that a brand's activities on social media positively shape consumer responses. Higher social media usage by a brand leads to increased Brand Awareness, enhancing consumer recognition and recall. It also significantly influences Brand Image, demonstrating that a brand's online persona directly impacts consumer perceptions of its values and character. Furthermore, social media drives Consumer Engagement, which in turn not only bolsters awareness and image but is fundamentally linked to fostering Brand Loyalty. The study also found direct pathways from both Brand Awareness and Brand Image to Brand Loyalty, alongside a significant direct effect of Consumer Engagement on loyalty intentions and behaviors.

Importantly, the research also validated the indirect role of social media. It revealed that SMU builds Brand Loyalty not just directly, but also *through* its positive effects on Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Consumer Engagement, which act as crucial mediators. This mediated relationship emphasizes the complex, interconnected system influencing consumer loyalty, and highlights the multi-layered approach required for effective digital branding. In essence, the study strongly supports the conclusion that social media is an indispensable tool for businesses aiming to strengthen their brand. It provides a dynamic stage for engaging customers, managing perceptions, and ultimately nurturing the long-term loyalty that underpins brand success.

Recommendations

The insights gleaned from this research translate into several practical strategies for firms and brand managers seeking to optimize their social media efforts for branding success and customer loyalty. A key takeaway is the imperative to actively foster brand engagement. This means moving beyond passive content delivery to create interactive experiences that encourage likes, comments, shares, and user contributions, as this engagement is a direct driver of loyalty (Dessart et al., 2015). Equally important is the cultivation of a consistent and authentic brand image across all social platforms. How a brand communicates its values and personality online significantly shapes consumer perceptions and loyalty, requiring careful alignment with its core brand identity (Aaker, 1996).

Furthermore, recognizing the power of social media in driving brand awareness, businesses should implement strategies specifically designed to enhance visibility and recall, such as targeted content, influencer partnerships, and engaging campaigns (Tyrväinen et al., 2023). A particularly potent approach involves encouraging user-generated content. Leveraging customer testimonials, reviews, and photos not only boosts engagement, but also builds invaluable trust and credibility, fostering a sense of community (Bagozzi et al., 2017). Central to these tactics should be a commitment to building long-term relationships, using social media for ongoing dialogue and personalized interaction that extends beyond immediate sales goals (Barger et al., 2016).

The significance of forging emotional connections through social media was also underscored. Sharing relatable stories, highlighting shared values, or offering authentic insights can create powerful bonds that translate into deeper trust and loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). To guide these efforts effectively, rigorous tracking and analysis of social media metrics is essential. Monitoring engagement data allows brands to understand what resonates with their audiences and continuously refine their strategies for maximum impact (Hair et al., 2010).

Looking ahead, this research opens doors for further exploration. Future studies could explore the roles played by specific social media platforms in influencing branding outcomes, providing more granular insights for platform-specific tactics. Moreover, employing longitudinal research designs would be beneficial. While the current study offers valuable correlational evidence,

longitudinal approaches could provide stronger causal evidence regarding how social media usage shapes brand loyalty trajectories over extended periods.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this study demonstrate the important role that social media plays in creating brand awareness, enhancing brand image, engaging with consumers, and building brand loyalty. Those brands that can use social media to engage with consumers, create engaging content, and consistently communicate their values can build strong and lasting relationships with consumers. Since social media is still an emerging industry, businesses must update their strategies to remain current and competitive in an increasingly digital business landscape. By adhering to these principles, brands can position themselves for success in the changing marketplace of modern marketing.

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Dancing with Heritage: Lived Experiences of Physical Education Teachers in Teaching 'Curacha Samareña' Folk Dance

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study explored the lived experiences of Department of Education Physical Education (PE) teachers in teaching the folk dance 'Curacha Samareña' of Samar, Philippines. Specifically, it aimed to investigate the pedagogies of teaching the 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance, and to identify the challenges and successes encountered by these teachers.

Introduction/Background: The Philippines has a long history of colonization, which shaped its vibrant culture and tradition, including the country's dances. As an archipelago, it has different folk dances, and some of these dances are integrated across school curricula. This study explored the lived experiences of PE teachers on the nature and cultural significance of teaching the folk dance 'Curacha Samareña' in Samar Division, Samar, Philippines.

Methodology: The study utilized a qualitative-phenomenology design employing an interview guide. Thirty-nine (39) teacher-participants were identified using purposive sampling in five (5) different secondary schools in Samar Division, Philippines.

Findings: The Samar natives, or 'Samareños', perform the 'Curacha Samareña' dance as a form of thanksgiving, and it reflects the vibrance of the local culture. While 'Curacha Samareña' is not included as a dance topic in the present Physical Education curriculum, Physical Education teachers must still be trained for local dances and act as cultural bearers. Some Physical Education teachers lack the knowledge and dancing skills to teach 'Curacha Samareña' due to a lack of training, opportunities, and support. Based on the data analysis and themes generated, it was concluded that 'Curacha Samareña' is a folk dance of vital importance to the people of Samar. However, it is currently facing deculturation due to its exclusion from the school curriculum. The absence of this cultural practice in educational settings risks eroding the community's cultural memory. It is not just a sprightly and fast-paced dance, but also one with profound cultural and historical significance. This folk dance is intricately tied to the identity of 'Samareños,' as it depicts their vibrant and joyous nature. Its movements and rhythms reflect the historical experiences and emotions of the community. Furthermore, it demystifies the notion that 'Samareños' are lavish; instead, it highlights their gratitude and bravery.

Contribution/Impact on Society: The study highlights the cultural and historical importance of 'Curacha Samareña,' a cherished folk dance deeply rooted in the identity and traditions of the people of Samar. However, its exclusion from the school curriculum has placed it at risk of deculturation, and the erosion of cultural memory, threatening its continuity. Reintroducing this dance into educational settings and promoting collaborative efforts between schools and cultural organizations can play a crucial role in safeguarding its legacy. Programs, workshops, and performances that actively engage all generations ensure the transmission of cultural knowledge, foster community pride, and strengthen intergenerational connections. Furthermore, celebrating 'Curacha Samareña' on national

and international platforms can showcase the unique heritage of Samar, ensuring it is treasured and preserved for generations to come.

Recommendations: Physical Education teachers should undergo specialized training so that they can effectively teach folk dances, as they play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting regional heritage. Including local and regional dances, such as 'Curacha Samareña,' in the Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH) curriculum enriches education while fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity. Teachers' active involvement in curriculum development ensures that educational content remains both culturally relevant and pedagogically sound, benefiting future generations.

Additionally, preserving local dances through community-based programs, workshops, and school initiatives is vital for maintaining cultural heritage and strengthening national identity. These efforts encourage active participation and engagement across all generations, promoting cultural appreciation and safeguarding traditional practices. By prioritizing these initiatives, communities can protect their cultural richness and celebrate the diversity that shapes their identity.

Research Limitation: The present study only delved into the experiences and pedagogies of Physical Education teachers in teaching 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance, a local dance of Samar, Philippines. There were 39 teacher-participants from selected schools in the Department of Education, Samar Division, Philippines.

Future Research: For future investigations on this topic, the researchers suggest that in-depth studies be conducted on the role of teachers instructing local and regional dances that have cultural value. Moreover, conducting an experimental or pilot study on integrating local and regional dances into the present K-12 curriculum is strongly suggested, and not just popularized national dances. Likewise, while this perspective is local, a similar study may be conducted in other countries and in other curricula. An international approach may provide comparative data, enriching our understanding of how diverse dance traditions can be preserved and promoted globally. Furthermore, collaboration with international educational institutions could offer a broader perspective on the benefits and challenges of integrating local dances into modern educational systems.

Keywords: *Samar cultural heritage, dance education and teaching*

Introduction

In today's borderless education, it is vital to know one's own culture while appreciating those of others. Cultural education has multifaceted values, encompassing social, economic, and educational dimensions. It fosters a sense of identity and belonging, and the school curriculum plays a pivotal role. Preservation efforts must ensure that heritage is maintained for future generations. Cultural education begins in schools, formal or non-formal, where students learn about their heritage, fostering pride and a sense of responsibility towards its preservation (Silva et al., 2024). Cultural education can also drive economic growth through tourism and local businesses, aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022).

Cultural education around the globe plays a crucial role in addressing societal changes, promoting intercultural dialogue, and preserving national values amidst globalization. Moreover, global awareness and competence are essential in the face of rapid global changes, urging a more intentional pursuit of truly global education (Gube, 2023). As globalization blurs borders and exposes states to external influences, education becomes a medium for cultural conservation and transmission of noble values against the eroding effects of global cultures (Kamal et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the cultural awareness of students is crucial for their development and education (Yusri et al., 2023). Teachers, such as dance teachers, play a crucial role in reinforcing cultural awareness among students (Abdallah & Alkaabi, 2023). Additionally, students' cultural awareness of dance is influenced by various factors such as family background, educational systems, and exposure

to different cultural dances. Research has indicated that multicultural dance education plays a crucial role in enhancing students' understanding of diverse cultures (Albattat et al., 2016).

The Philippines' multiculturalism is a result of its unique landscape and history, and this is evident in the diversity of cultures, traditions, beliefs, and practices. The kinds of dances found in a nation reveal the culture, art, and temperament of its people (Aquino, 1952). It is likewise believed that among the many different sources of a nation's cultural tradition, folk dances are considered one of the best (Patterson et al., 2018). As stated in the Philippine Constitution Article XIV Section 15, "the state shall conserve, promote and popularize the nation's historical and cultural heritage and resources, as well as artistic expressions," and in Section 17, "the state shall recognize, respect, and protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions, and institutions". Hence, there is a need to inculcate the significance of culture and values through education for sustainable development in a social context (Mathews & Savarimuthu, 2020).

Moreover, the evolution of Philippine dances, particularly in the context of cultural appropriation and transformation, has been a subject of exploration in various forms (Jacinto, 2013). This is because the landscape of Philippine dance is multifaceted, and the ongoing practice of "Filipizining", or adding a Filipino taste to different dance disciplines, is an artistic articulation of differences (Bautista, 2019). This highlights the need for cultural awareness among students and teachers in educational settings.

Additionally, teachers can serve as guides for students by creating an environment that challenges and motivates dancers to reach their highest level of mastery, while also encouraging dancers to respect their bodies and elevate their spirits (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010). This is also supported by a study by Hong-Joe (2002), who noted that the development of teachers' self-assurance and competence in teaching dance is the most significant challenge in dance education. Demystifying dance and educating students and the public about its scope and value are areas for improvement.

According to Bautista (2019), there are evident gaps in teaching dances in the Philippines, particularly in the areas of traditional and folk dances. Studies show a decline in students' interest in traditional dances, emphasizing the need for further investigation and solutions to enhance appreciation for cultural arts, as supported in a study by Longley and Buck (2019). Research has indicated that while there are high levels of practice in preserving and strengthening Philippine folk dances, students exhibit better knowledge of dance literature than actual folk dances, showcasing a gap in knowledge transfer and engagement in dance education (Poralan et al., 2012). These studies collectively underscore the significance of understanding and addressing the challenges faced by dance educators in promoting cultural appreciation and enriching the teaching of traditional dances in the Philippines.

Philippine dances symbolize and exemplify the fusion of several cultural traditions that characterize the Philippines (Namiki, 2011). While the 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance is widely known in Samar, its historical significance is slowly vanishing because of foreign cultural assimilation and its exclusion from the school curriculum. Ironically, despite the growing interest in anthropology of the body, the study of moving bodies, such as dance, remains marginal (Lock, 1993).

Folk dances must be preserved due to their cultural significance and role in heritage conservation (Kalita & Deka, 2020). Preserving traditional dances helps to maintain a rich and varied history for future generations, contributing to the preservation of national culture and traditions. Additionally, traditional dances are considered true treasures that should be safeguarded through documentation and digital preservation (Chau & Ma, 2020). For a Physical Education (PE) teacher to embody the "Samarnon" culture, he must have knowledge of and be adept at skills in folk dances. Teaching these dances maintains cultural continuity by handing it down to the next generation (Dacanay et al., 2021). Hence, the present study investigated the experiences and teaching pedagogies of PE teachers in teaching 'Curacha Samareña' for the Department of Education (DepEd), Division of Samar, Philippines.

Literature Review

Dance Education in the Philippines

Dance education in the Philippines is evolving, particularly through the integration of technology and a focus on traditional practices. Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of online platforms and applications in enhancing students' engagement and knowledge of Philippine folk dances. This transition is crucial for preserving cultural heritage while adapting to modern educational needs. The study of Rea (2024) highlights a significant relationship between students' awareness of folk dances and their performance in physical education, suggesting that incorporating diverse activities can enhance overall academic success. Moreover, dance education in the Philippines incorporates traditional folk dances, emphasizing cultural identity. The curriculum includes instructional materials that utilize familiar folk songs, fostering meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences, while preserving Philippine culture amidst global influences (Ripalda, 2022).

Challenges in Teaching Folk Dance

Teaching folk dance in the Philippines faces several challenges that stem from cultural, educational, and social dynamics. These challenges include declining student interest, the impact of globalization, and the need for effective pedagogical strategies. Addressing these issues is crucial for preserving the rich heritage of Philippine folk dances and enhancing cultural awareness among students. This lack of engagement can be attributed to modern influences and a disconnect from cultural roots, necessitating innovative programs to rekindle interest in folk dance (Lobo, 2022). Furthermore, globalization poses a threat to the preservation of folk dances, as traditional practices are often overshadowed by global cultural trends (Poralan et al., 2012).

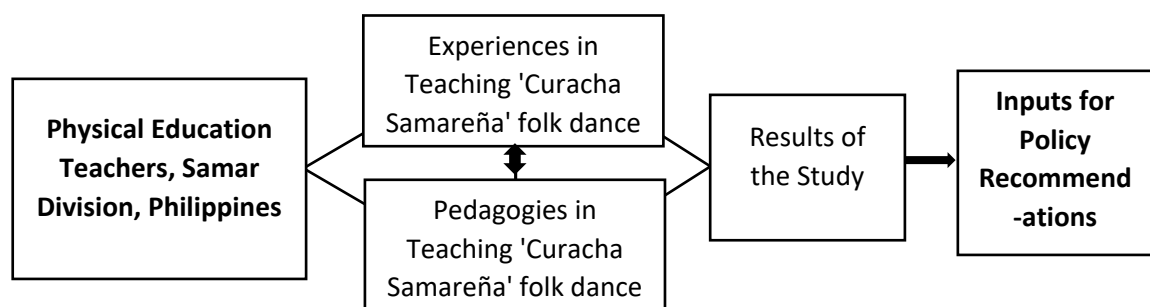
Future Directions of Teaching Folk Dance

Future directions of teaching folk dance in the Philippines are shaped by the need to enhance cultural appreciation, integrate technology, and adapt pedagogical practices. As interest in traditional dances declines among students, innovative approaches are essential to revitalize engagement and understanding of this cultural heritage. Integrating folk pedagogy with modern teaching methodologies can enhance the effectiveness of folk-dance education, ensuring it remains relevant in contemporary settings (Murotovna, 2024). Additionally, teachers must emphasize the holistic benefits of folk dance, including mental resilience and cultural identity, to further justify its inclusion in educational curricula (Talpă, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below illustrates the study's conceptual framework and methodology. The researchers selected several secondary schools within the Department of Education of Samar and conducted interviews with PE teachers to gather their lived experiences in teaching the 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance. This qualitative study aimed to explore the pedagogies, challenges, and successes encountered by the teachers in imparting this cultural tradition.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework of the Study*



Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative design was utilized in this research study to investigate the lived experiences of Physical Education (PE) teachers in teaching 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance for the Department of Education, Samar Division, Philippines. To explore their experiences, a phenomenological approach was used. Additionally, the research concentrated on the phenomenon of teaching folk dance.

Population and Sample Size

Thirty-nine (39) teacher-participants were identified who met the inclusion criteria, which were:

- a junior high school and senior high school PE teacher, and
- non-Physical Education (PE) degree holders handling PE and dance subjects.

Teacher-participants came from five different junior high schools in the Department of Education (DepEd), Samar Division, Samar, Philippines, namely (a) Wright National High School, (b) Hinabangan National High School, (c) Calbiga National High School, (d) San Jose De Buan National High School, and (e) Motiong National High School. All PE teachers from these five schools participated in the study. Specifically, there were eight teacher-participants from Wright National High School, six from Hinabangan National High School, 12 from Calbiga National High School, three from San Jose De Buan National High School, and 10 from Motiong National High School, for a total of 39 teacher-participants.

The Samar State University Institutional Ethics Review Board (SSU-IERB) recommended that a large sample size was required. Additionally, Creswell (2007) highlighted that study participants typically exceeding 25 were considered essential for capturing diverse perspectives, ensuring data saturation, and facilitating robust thematic development. This approach acknowledged that PE teachers bring distinct experiences and pedagogical approaches to the instruction of folk dance, enriching the study's depth and validity.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was utilized in the present study since the participants were PE teachers teaching dance subjects, specifically the 'Curacha Samareña', to ensure that the data that was gathered would be rich and insightful.

Research Instruments

To learn more about the teacher-participants' lives, an interview guide was used. Focus group discussions were also conducted using a group interview guide; these interviews were done at convenient times for the participants.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the national and institutional guidelines for research involving human subjects. Ethical approval was obtained from the SSU-IERB before the study commenced. Moreover, the teacher-participants received written and oral information about the study's objectives and benefits. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they could opt to withdraw at any time without needing to give an explanation. Confidentiality was assured according to ethical research guidelines.

Data Gathering Procedures

After securing ethical clearance for the study, a letter stating its objectives and requesting permission to conduct it was sent to the principal of each school. An unstructured interview guide, approved by the SSU-IERB, was used to gather the data. This instrument helped the researchers to collect crucial information and ask suitable follow-up questions, allowing teacher-participants to elaborate on their previous responses. Furthermore, before data gathering began, the researchers' proposed procedure and protocol were submitted and approved by the SSU-IERB, considering ethical considerations regarding the interviews, interpretation, handling, and disposal of data. Lastly, the in-

depth interviews lasted for thirty minutes to ninety minutes, depending on how well the PE teachers could recall their experiences and respond to each question.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. This method aided the researchers in finding, understanding, describing, and depicting the lived experiences of PE teacher-participants, revealing emergent themes and their interwoven relationships. The study followed Colaizzi's structured seven-step process, which included reading and familiarizing oneself with the data, extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, developing an exhaustive description, identifying the fundamental structure, and validating findings with the teacher-participants. This was done to ensure a deep, reflective understanding of human experiences while maintaining methodological rigor and credibility. The data from each interview was gathered, organized, and carefully examined by the researchers to produce textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

The researchers ensured trustworthiness by maintaining transparency throughout the data collection and analysis process, thereby fostering credibility in the study's findings. To further enhance rigor, they implemented strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and thick description, enabling a more profound, context-rich exploration of the lived experiences of the PE teacher-participants.

Results and Discussion

The research questions explored the experiences and pedagogies in teaching 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance, and after the data analyses, four main themes emerged:

1. 'Curacha Samareña' is a fast and lively couple dance.
2. 'Curacha Samareña' entails that Samar natives, or 'Samareños', perform the dance as a form of thanksgiving.
3. 'Curacha Samareña' is not included as one of the dance topics in Physical Education class under the present curriculum.
4. Physical Education teachers must be trained in local dances and act as cultural bearers.

Subthemes are also presented below.

Theme 1. 'Curacha Samareña' is a fast and lively couple dance.

PE01 – "It is a lively traditional couple dance, with couples happily dancing".

PE07 – "Curacha Samareña is a fast and happy dance performed by couples."

PE12 – "Curacha Samareña is a dance that requires skilled dancers because it has a fast tune."

PE16 – "It is a dance with fast musical accompaniment."

PE28 – "Curacha Samareña is a dance by both partners showing fast movements and with improvisation while performing."

Subtheme 1.1. 'Curacha Samareña' is a dance with high dexterity.

PE10 – "Dancers must be quick in performing the steps."

PE17 – "Dancers must be able to quickly improvise steps while performing."

PE22 – "Dancers should have quick reflexes in dancing."

In his book, Miel (1973) described Curacha Samareña as a sprightly, fast-paced dance requiring a lot of skill and dexterity on the part of the dancers, and this is common among typical Curacha steps in the province of Samar. Philippine dances are known for their fast-paced movements (Lewis, 2012). It involves dynamic steps such as jogging, forward-backward movements, arm swings, and quick clap cycles, enhancing performers' health and fitness levels (Martin & Miller, 2018). This implies that the nature of the dance is fast, lively, and requires dexterity.

Theme 2. ‘Curacha Samareña’ entails that Samar natives, or ‘Samareños’, perform the dance as a form of thanksgiving.

- PE02 – *“Dancing ‘Curacha Samareña’ is symbolic for ‘Samareños’ since they offer their gratitude to the highest being.”*
- PE06 – *“When ‘Samareños’ dance while throwing paper bills in the air, it is their way of giving back to others.”*
- PE 16 – *“In Samar, couples dance to showcase their wealth, and they do the ‘Saburak’, or a dance movement that means throwing paper bills in the air, while dancing.”*
- PE23 – *“People in Samar or ‘Samareños’ would gather, prepare food, and dance “Curacha Samareña”.*
- PE31 – *“Curacha Samareña dance symbolizes the faith of ‘Samareños’ to good returns and good harvests.*

Subtheme 2.1. ‘Curacha Samareña’ reflects the vibrancy of the local culture.

- PE12 – *“The colors of Samar culture are depicted in the dance.”*
- PE36 – *“Curacha Samareña’ shows how people are happy, and it reflects the positive character of the local culture.”*
- PE39 – *“There is so much in Samar that people must know, and it is shown in the dance.”*

Traditional dances can serve as a form of imploring for a good harvest, reflecting cultural expressions of gratitude and celebration, and they hold significant cultural value, embodying artistic, spiritual, and socio-contextual perspectives (Wowiling, 2013). Additionally, traditional dances are a part of ceremonies like Thanksgiving, where they play a role in showcasing gratitude and celebrating the harvest season (Lebaka, 2012). This implies that local dances symbolize faith for a good harvest and reflect the cultural attributes of a given place.

Theme 3. ‘Curacha Samareña’ is not included as one of the dance topics in Physical Education classes under the present curriculum.

- PE02 – *“Learners today no longer appreciate folk dance because the curriculum is focused on academic subjects.”*
- PE07 – *“Based on the present curriculum, there is no lesson that includes ‘Curacha Samareña’ as one of the topics in dance.”*
- PE15 – *“Only national dances and some Asian dances are included in the dance curriculum in MAPEH; regional and local dances must also be included so that students will be able to know and appreciate the Samar culture.”*
- PE30 – *“This dance has to be included in the curriculum so that the Samar culture lives on even among the young learners of today.”*
- PE35 – *“Learners lack local knowledge of the culture and traditions of Samar.”*

Subtheme 3.1. Some Physical Education teachers lack the knowledge and dancing skills to teach ‘Curacha Samareña’.

- PE07 – *Other PE teachers are not knowledgeable of the dance background, history, and basic skills.*
- PE19 – *Some teachers no longer teach the dance because it is challenging for them due to its degree of difficulty.*
- PE22 – *Other teachers prefer to teach national or international dances that have easy steps and slow-paced music.*

The exclusion of local dances in education is a prevalent issue observed in various educational settings, leading to negative attitudes among students toward their cultural heritage (Mensah & Acquah, 2021). On a positive note, students who took folk dance training had a positive attitude toward dance (Altun & Atasoy, 2019), suggesting that traditional dances should be included in the

curriculum so that students would better appreciate local culture, especially in the rapid curriculum revamp in the Philippines.

Theme 4. Physical Education teachers must be trained in local dances and act as cultural bearers.

PE05 – “Physical Education teachers play a vital role in promoting local culture, but they lack training.”

PE13 – “As teachers, it is their task to promote local dances and local culture as well.”

PE22 – “Physical Education must be trained in teaching local dances to students.”

PE28 – “Physical Education teachers lack training relative to their subjects handled, more so, in dance.”

PE37 – “The Department of Education must train Physical Education teachers to teach local dances since they are also cultural bearers.”

Subtheme 4.1. Some teachers in the Department of Education (DepEd) lack training because of a lack of opportunities and support.

PE10 – “Some teachers, especially Physical Education teachers, lack training due to the unavailability of specialized training for them.”

PE19 – “Physical Education teachers are burdened with other duties and responsibilities in school, leading to a lack of training.”

PE22 – “Teachers often do not have the chance to attend training because it is expensive, and they spend their resources instead of the school’s.”

Physical education teachers must be trained in dance to enhance their practical teaching abilities, develop motivational styles, and understand cross-cultural interactions (Amado et al., 2020). Additionally, training in dance helps teachers cultivate students' interests, movement skills, and cultural awareness (Li & Yang, 2022). These factors imply the need for dance training among Physical Education teachers.

Contribution/Impact on Society

From the data analyses and themes generated, it was concluded that ‘Curacha Samareña’ is a folk dance of vital importance to the people of Samar. However, it is currently facing deculturation due to its exclusion from the school curriculum. The absence of this cultural practice in educational settings risks eroding the cultural memory of the community. It is not just a sprightly and fast-paced dance, but also one with profound cultural and historical significance. This folk dance is intricately tied to the identity of ‘Samareños,’ as it depicts their vibrant and joyous nature. Its movements and rhythms reflect the historical experiences and emotions of the community.

Furthermore, it demystifies the notion that ‘Samareños’ are lavish; instead, it highlights their gratitude and bravery. The preservation of ‘Curacha Samareña’ within the educational system is essential to maintaining the rich cultural tapestry of Samar. By reintroducing this dance into the curriculum and emphasizing a contextualization approach to teaching, we can ensure that future generations can appreciate and uphold this significant aspect of their heritage. Educators play a crucial role in embedding these cultural elements into students' lives, fostering a deep sense of pride and identity.

In addition to curriculum inclusion, collaborative efforts between educational institutions and cultural organizations can amplify the preservation and promotion of ‘Curacha Samareña.’ These partnerships can lead to the creation of sustainable cultural programs that benefit the entire community. Community-based programs, workshops, and public performances can engage both young and old in actively participating in this folk dance, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and pride. Intergenerational activities can further strengthen the bonds within the community and ensure the transmission of cultural knowledge. These initiatives can also serve as platforms for cultural exchange, allowing people from different regions to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of

Samar's cultural heritage. By showcasing 'Curacha Samareña' on national and international stages, the cultural legacy of Samar can be celebrated and preserved for generations to come.

Recommendations

Physical Education (PE) teachers must be trained, based on their expertise, to teach folk dance because they serve as cultural bearers of the community. This training ensures that they can effectively preserve and transmit the unique cultural heritage of their respective regions. There is also a need to contextualize and include regional and local dances into the current Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH) curriculum in the Philippines. This inclusion not only enriches the curriculum but also instills a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity among students. It is also suggested that an experimental study be conducted on the inclusion of other regional dances in the MAPEH curriculum, which could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of various cultural practices.

Additionally, PE teachers must be involved in curriculum crafting since they are not just teachers, but also cultural bearers. Their participation would ensure that the curriculum is both culturally relevant and pedagogically sound. Moreover, the 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance must be preserved and promoted locally in the educational sector. By doing so, the educational sector can play a pivotal role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Lastly, local dances must be preserved to maintain the cultural heritage and identity of a given place. Preservation efforts of local dances help foster a sense of nationality, so that students, teachers, and communities can protect their cultural richness and promote cultural diversity. Furthermore, initiatives should be taken to incorporate community-based dance programs that encourage active participation and appreciation from younger generations.

Research Limitation

The present study only delved into the experiences and pedagogies of Physical Education teachers in teaching 'Curacha Samareña' folk dance, a local dance of Samar, Philippines. There were only (39) teacher-participants from selected schools in the Department of Education, Samar Division, Philippines.

Future Research

For future directions based upon this study, the researchers suggest that a deeper investigation be conducted of the role of teachers in teaching local and regional dances which have cultural value. Moreover, we strongly suggest conducting an experimental pilot study to integrate local and regional dances into the present K-12 curriculum, not just popularized national dances. Likewise, while this perspective is local, similar studies may also be conducted in other countries and in other curricula. Such an international approach would provide comparative data, enriching our understanding of how diverse dance traditions can be preserved and promoted globally. Furthermore, collaboration with international educational institutions could offer a broader perspective on the benefits and challenges of integrating local dances into modern educational systems.

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Examining Organizational Support Practices and Job Characteristics in Fostering Employee Commitment: A Case Study

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study investigated the influence of Human Resource Organizational Support (HROS) practices on employee commitment in a technology-driven business environment. Employee commitment is a strategic imperative for organizations navigating rapid innovation and digital transformation. Despite extensive research, there remains limited empirical evidence on how specific organizational support practices, such as recognition, communication, professional development, work-life balance, and employee involvement, impact employee commitment within tech-oriented workplaces in Southeast Asia. By focusing on Sun Asterisk Development Inc. in Cebu City, Philippines, this research aimed to contribute regional and industry-specific insights to the global discourse on human capital management.

Introduction/Background: This paper addresses the issue of a limited understanding of how HROS factors impact employee commitment within technology-driven and innovative environments. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), the study examined the relationships between recognition, communication, professional development, work-life balance, employee involvement, and their influence on commitment. Focusing on Sun Asterisk Development Inc., a dynamic and tech-oriented organization, the research highlights the importance of modern HR practices in enhancing employee engagement and loyalty. This study contributes valuable insights into strategies that can sustain commitment in rapidly evolving business contexts.

Methodology: A descriptive-correlational research design was employed in this study. Data were gathered from 50 purposively selected full-time employees of Sun Asterisk Development Inc., a software development company with a dynamic organizational culture. A structured survey instrument was utilized to capture employees' perceptions of HROS practices and their levels of commitment. The instrument included multiple items per construct and used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to summarize employee perceptions. Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to examine the strength and direction of relationships between HROS indicators and employee commitment dimensions based on Job Characteristics Theory. Instrument validity was ensured through expert review, and internal consistency was established via Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

Findings: The findings revealed that employees perceived high levels of support across all five HROS domains, with average mean scores falling under the "Strongly Agree" category. Among these, work-life balance received the highest rating ($M = 3.49$), followed by communication and employee involvement. Significant positive correlations were found between HROS practices and key job characteristics. Recognition and reward systems were strongly correlated with autonomy ($r = .472, p < .001$) and feedback ($r = .411, p = .002$). Communication mechanisms showed a high correlation with task significance ($r = .597, p < .001$), while professional development and employee involvement were positively linked to skill variety and task identity. These results suggest that reinforcing HROS factors enhances both the perceived meaningfulness of work and employee commitment.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This research contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of employee commitment in three significant ways. First, it operationalizes the relationship between HROS and job characteristics in a single, integrated framework grounded in Social Exchange Theory and Job Characteristics Theory, addressing the call for multidimensional models in HR literature. Second, it contextualizes this framework within a Southeast Asian tech enterprise, offering localized insights often absent in mainstream HR research. Third, it introduces the Enhanced Metrics Evaluation Plan, a proposed diagnostic tool for assessing organizational support practices in technology-driven firms. This model can serve as a basis for comparative studies across industries and regions.

Recommendations: Organizations should enhance Human Resource Organizational Support by implementing robust recognition systems, open communication channels, and continuous professional development programs. Emphasizing work-life balance and actively involving employees in decision-making are essential for fostering commitment. HR practitioners should regularly assess employee perceptions through surveys and feedback mechanisms to identify areas for improvement. Additionally, managers should tailor support practices to align with employees' needs and organizational goals. Integrating flexible work arrangements and fostering a culture of appreciation can further boost commitment and reduce turnover. Future initiatives should prioritize employee well-being to sustain productivity and job satisfaction within dynamic work environments.

Research Limitations: Despite its contributions, the study had limitations. The sample size, though representative of the company's workforce, was relatively small and drawn from a single firm, which limits the generalizability of findings. Its cross-sectional nature prevents assessment of changes over time, and reliance on self-reported data may have introduced response bias. Moreover, Objective 2, which explored the impact of job characteristics on commitment, requires further analytical depth in future iterations.

Future Research: Future studies should employ longitudinal or mixed method designs to capture evolving employee perceptions and deepen theoretical insights. Expanding the sample to include other tech firms or comparing findings with traditional industries could broaden the applicability of results. Researchers may also explore mediating or moderating effects (e.g., leadership style, organizational culture) between HROS and commitment. Finally, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups would enrich the interpretation of the nuanced interplay between HR practices and employee engagement.

Keywords: *Employee commitment, human resource organizational support*

Introduction

Enhancing organizational employee commitment remains a fundamental challenge for businesses striving to achieve operational excellence and sustainable growth. In the contemporary business landscape, characterized by rapid technological advancements, evolving work paradigms, and intensified global competition, fostering employee commitment has transcended from being merely a policy concern to becoming a strategic imperative. As organizations navigate the complexities of post-pandemic business environments, maintaining high levels of employee loyalty and motivation has become increasingly crucial to sustaining productivity, fostering innovation, and driving overall performance (Rudi et al., 2024). Employee commitment, shaped by factors such as recognition systems, professional development opportunities, work-life balance, communication mechanisms, and employee involvement, plays a pivotal role in shaping an organization's ability to build a resilient and dedicated workforce.

This study was conducted in Guadalupe, Cebu City, a thriving urban hub known for its vibrant business community and dynamic labor market. As one of Cebu City's key business districts, Guadalupe hosts a wide range of enterprises, including both local and multinational companies. Notably, Sun Asterisk Development Inc., a prominent software development firm located in this area, represented

an ideal context for examining employee commitment due to its diverse workforce, dynamic organizational culture, and commitment to continuous professional development. Understanding how employee commitment is fostered within such an innovative environment can provide valuable insights for similar businesses aiming to enhance workforce engagement and productivity. This focus is especially relevant given that modern technology-driven organizations face unique challenges in sustaining employee loyalty amidst rapid digital transformation (Jesus et al., 2024).

This study drew on two primary theoretical frameworks to analyze organizational employee commitment: Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Job Characteristics Theory (JCT). Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that employee commitment is cultivated through reciprocal relationships where employees feel valued and supported by their organization (Blau, 1986). Increased commitment and loyalty are the results of organizations that establish a sense of organizational support through the implementation of efficient recognition and reward systems, uphold communication and feedback mechanisms, and offer professional development opportunities (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). According to recent research, praising and rewarding workers' accomplishments is essential for increasing loyalty, especially in creative settings (Rudi et al., 2024).

Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976), highlights that job satisfaction and commitment are influenced by five core job dimensions: Skill Variety, Task Identity, Task Significance, Autonomy, and Feedback. These constructs are essential for enhancing employee motivation and performance, as jobs that incorporate these dimensions tend to foster intrinsic motivation and a sense of meaningful contribution (Fried & Ferris, 1987). This theory aligns with the innovative work setting of Sun Asterisk Development Inc., where employees' tasks are diversified and meaningful, contributing to commitment and engagement. Furthermore, work-life balance is considered essential in contemporary organizational practices since it has a substantial impact on employees' dedication and well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). According to Cotton et al. (1988), the incorporation of employee involvement highlights the significance of participatory decision-making, which is associated with increased commitment and job satisfaction. Research shows that improved communication and feedback systems, among other contemporary HR practices, greatly increase company productivity (Newsham et al., 2022).

The Philippine Labor Code [Presidential Decree No. 442, as amended] (1974), which protects the rights of employees to equitable pay, professional growth, and work-life balance, serves as the study's legal cornerstone. Additionally, the Department of Labor and Employment created the Occupational Safety and Health Standards (1978), which emphasize the significance of preserving safe and comfortable work environments and are directly related to employee dedication and well-being. Respecting these legal standards fosters a positive and encouraging work atmosphere, which is essential to maintaining employee loyalty.

Despite extensive research on employee commitment, a gap remains in understanding how modern HR practices and job characteristics intersect to influence commitment within technology-driven organizations, particularly in the Philippine context. Although prior studies have explored individual constructs, few have comprehensively examined how these variables interact within an innovative firm like Sun Asterisk Development Inc. Furthermore, while previous meta-analyses have identified factors influencing employee loyalty (Rudi et al., 2024), there is limited empirical evidence from tech-focused environments, especially within Cebu City's dynamic business sector.

This study's integrative and context-specific approach combined SET and JCT while addressing the challenges faced by tech-driven enterprises. Quantitative methods were employed, specifically Pearson's correlation (r), to propose an Enhanced Metrics Evaluation Plan designed to effectively assess organizational commitment. By examining the impact of digital transformation, particularly within the software development sector, the researchers sought to uncover how technological advancements influenced employee commitment (Jesus et al., 2024). Furthermore, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of employee performance trends (Menhat et al., 2025) underscored the growing demand for innovative frameworks to assess organizational commitment. This study aimed to fill this gap by introducing a robust, data-driven approach to understanding and evaluating commitment in

the evolving digital landscape. By focusing on Sun Asterisk Development Inc. and leveraging robust theoretical foundations, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on optimizing employee commitment, offering practical insights for dynamic business environments in Cebu City.

Literature Review

Employee commitment plays a pivotal role in enhancing organizational efficiency, retention, and long-term sustainability. Numerous studies have explored how human resource strategies influence commitment, focusing on key themes such as recognition, communication, development, work-life balance, and job design. This literature review synthesizes prior findings under core categories relevant to Human Resource Organizational Support (HROS) and Job Characteristics Theory (JCT).

Recognition and Reward System

Recognition systems are foundational in fostering employee commitment by reinforcing valued behavior. Bahuguna et al. (2023) emphasized that when recognition aligns with both organizational and individual goals, it significantly boosts employee engagement. Similarly, Antony et al. (2023) found that readiness for organizational innovation (e.g., Quality 4.0) was enhanced by well-structured reward systems, which encourage employees to embrace change. In contrast, Mio et al. (2022) argued for the utility of performance measurement tools such as balanced scorecards, suggesting these indirectly enhance commitment through performance monitoring. Together, these studies suggest that recognition contributes both structural and motivational reinforcement toward commitment.

Communication and Feedback Mechanisms

Transparent communication and effective feedback are critical for fostering trust and commitment. Prasad et al. (2023) found that participatory communication enhanced lean readiness and engagement, while Gafni et al. (2024) showed that AI-driven feedback improved soft skills, enhancing perceived support. Conversely, Bader et al. (2024) warned that communication breakdowns were a key reason for process failure, underlining a need for continuous feedback loops. Collectively, these studies indicate that both traditional and technology-mediated communication channels are instrumental in building employee commitment.

Professional Development Opportunities

Providing structured career development is a recurring theme in sustaining loyalty. Obeng-Tuaah (2025) highlighted the direct link between training and organizational performance, while Lubis et al. (2024) noted that competency-based performance systems accelerated career progression and commitment. Complementarily, Saputra et al. (2024) emphasized capacity building as central to long-term success. These perspectives collectively reinforced that continuous development is a strategic tool for fostering employee investment in organizational goals.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance initiatives are increasingly recognized as strategic levers for organizational commitment. Akter et al. (2022) associated flexible HR policies with increased loyalty and reduced fatigue, while Lin et al. (2024) demonstrated that green HR management practices improved both retention and sustainability performance. Adah et al. (2025) further observed that balance is essential in high-stress industries, such as construction. Across contexts, a common thread has emerged: work-life harmony directly contributes to sustained commitment and employee well-being.

Employee Involvement

Involving employees in decision-making enhances their sense of ownership and alignment with the firm's goals. Abu Orabi et al. (2024) linked strategic participation with higher engagement, while Saini (2025) reported a reduction in turnover intentions among more involved employees. Supporting this, Andrić et al. (2023) showed that involvement was crucial in preserving morale during crisis

conditions like the pandemic. These findings collectively advocate for participatory HR frameworks to deepen commitment.

Skill Variety

Job roles that incorporate diverse skills tend to increase employee motivation and reduce monotony. Ria Andriany et al. (2025) emphasized that variety contributes to sustainable performance, while Fantozzi et al. (2024) underlined the importance of embedding soft skills within job design to improve satisfaction. Straub et al. (2023) added that evolving business models demand continuous upskilling, which in turn cultivates loyalty. These insights suggest that skill variety is both a driver of engagement and a response to dynamic industry needs.

Task Identity

Clarity and coherence in job roles enhance employees' connection to their work. Chen et al. (2023) found that when employees clearly understand their tasks, satisfaction and retention increase. Raut et al. (2022) expanded this by noting that task identity supports workforce agility, especially in response to a crisis. El-Masri et al. (2023) added a digital perspective, arguing that task-technology fit enhances user satisfaction, which in turn drives commitment. These findings affirm that meaningful task structures enhance employee focus and loyalty.

Task Significance

The perceived importance of a job role is another key determinant of commitment. López-Cabarcos et al. (2022) observed that leadership emphasizing task significance improved job performance, while Raut et al. (2022) associated it with deeper organizational attachment. Kumpulainen and Seppänen (2022) also found that aligning tasks with strategic goals boosted motivation. Together, these findings suggest that employees who perceive their work as impactful are more likely to remain committed.

Autonomy

Job autonomy enhances psychological ownership and intrinsic motivation. Idris et al. (2023) linked autonomy to improved engagement and satisfaction in healthcare settings. Similarly, Yang et al. (2022) emphasized that leadership support for autonomy strengthens participation in academic environments. Kovačić et al. (2022) added that autonomous roles in sustainable mobility projects reinforced both commitment and responsibility. These perspectives consistently show that autonomy fosters proactive and loyal employee behavior.

Feedback

Regular, constructive feedback shapes employee development and organizational alignment. Mößlang et al. (2024) emphasized feedback's role in sustaining a culture of continuous improvement. Xiao and Tian (2023) illustrated its importance in strategic operations, while Kaurav and Gupta (2022) tied feedback quality directly to organizational commitment. These studies collectively validated feedback as a central mechanism for performance and engagement management.

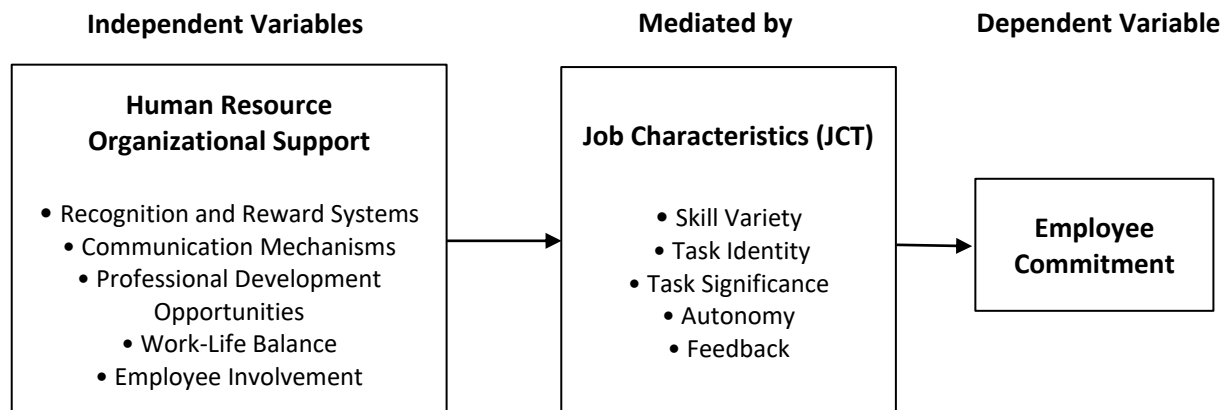
Research Objectives

The study aimed to assess employee commitment at Sun Asterisk Development Inc. in Guadalupe, Cebu City, Philippines, by examining the influence of organizational support practices and job characteristics. Specifically, the following aspects were addressed:

1. Evaluate the level of employee commitment concerning key Human Resource Organizational Support (HROS) practices.
2. Examine the impact of job characteristics on employee commitment.
3. Analyze the relationship between organizational support practices and job characteristics in fostering employee commitment within a technology-driven business context.

The study's variables are shown in its conceptual framework below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*



Methodology

Design

In this study, a descriptive-correlational research design was employed to evaluate the relationship between organizational support practices and employee commitment at Sun Asterisk Development Inc. The descriptive component explored how employees perceived support in terms of recognition, communication, professional development, work-life balance, and involvement. The correlational aspect assessed how these perceptions, along with core job characteristics (i.e., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback), influenced commitment levels. This design was appropriate for identifying both patterns of perception and the strength of inter-variable relationships without manipulating study conditions.

Study Setting

The research was conducted at Sun Asterisk Development Inc.'s Cebu City branch, located in Guadalupe, Philippines. As the Philippine branch of a global tech firm originally founded in Japan (2012), the Cebu office provided a dynamic, innovation-driven environment. This location was selected due to its multidimensional organizational structure, agile HR practices, and cultural orientation toward employee-centered management, making it an ideal setting for evaluating organizational support frameworks and employee commitment.

Respondents

Using purposive sampling, 50 regular, full-time employees from a total branch population of 52 were selected to participate. The inclusion criteria focused on employees with at least six months of tenure to ensure their familiarity with the company's HR systems and organizational structure. The small but representative sample ensured coverage of diverse job roles while controlling for transient or contractual employment biases. This approach allowed for in-depth insights into the commitment mechanisms within a technology-driven small business context.

Instrumentation

A structured survey instrument was used to measure key constructs aligned with the study's objectives. The questionnaire consisted of 35 items across 10 subscales, using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). Instrument reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all of which met or exceeded the acceptable threshold of .70. The questionnaire was validated through expert panel review and pilot testing with five employees from a similar industry, leading to minor revisions for clarity and contextual accuracy.

Table 1 *Constructs, Sample Items, Reliability Scores, and Sources for Employee Experience Measures*

Construct	Items	Sample Item	Cronbach's α	Source
Recognition	4	"I receive acknowledgment for my work performance."	.83	Bahuguna et al. (2023)
Communication	4	"There is open communication between management and staff."	.79	Prasad et al. (2023)
Professional Development	3	"The company provides opportunities for career growth."	.81	Obeng-Tuaah (2025)
Work-Life Balance	3	"Flexible work policies help me manage personal and professional responsibilities."	.76	Akter et al. (2022)
Employee Involvement	3	"I am involved in important decisions affecting my work."	.85	Abu Orabi et al. (2024)
Skill Variety	3	"My job allows me to use a variety of skills."	.74	Ria Andriany et al. (2025)
Task Identity	3	"My role involves completing tasks from beginning to end."	.80	Chen et al. (2023)
Task Significance	3	"I believe my work has a meaningful impact on the organization."	.77	Kumpulainen & Seppänen (2022)
Autonomy	3	"I have control over how I perform my job tasks."	.82	Idris et al. (2023)
Feedback	3	"I receive regular feedback about my work performance."	.84	Mößlang et al. (2024)

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through secure data handling and aggregate reporting. Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Research Ethics Board of the university.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to evaluate the overall level of perceived organizational support and employee commitment (Objective 1). Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to test the relationship between HROS factors and job characteristics (Objective 3). For Objective 2, the study specifically examined the impact of five core job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) on employee commitment. A multiple correlation analysis was conducted to determine which job characteristics were most predictive of commitment. Results included significance values (p -values), strength of relationships (r), and interpretations based on theoretical alignment with JCT. This dual-layered statistical approach provided a robust analysis of both general trends and specific predictive patterns, aligned with the study's framework and research objectives.

Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics reflecting employee perceptions of organizational support practices at Sun Asterisk Development Inc.

Table 2 *Employee Perceptions based on Organizational Support Indicators*

Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Recognition and Reward System	3.29	.43	Strongly Agree
Communication and Feedback Mechanisms	3.35	.43	Strongly Agree
Professional Development Opportunities	3.28	.46	Strongly Agree
Work-Life Balance	3.49	.36	Strongly Agree
Employee Involvement	3.33	.44	Strongly Agree
Aggregate	3.35	.42	Strongly Agree

Note. Strongly Disagree: 1.00–1.75; Disagree: 1.76–2.50; Agree: 2.51–3.25; Strongly Agree: 3.26–4.00

All five indicators—recognition and reward systems, communication and feedback mechanisms, professional development opportunities, work-life balance, and employee involvement—fell within the "Strongly Agree" category, with an overall mean of 3.35. Notably, work-life balance received the highest rating ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .36$), suggesting that employees particularly value flexibility and work-life integration within the company. In contrast, professional development opportunities received the lowest mean ($M = 3.28$), indicating a slightly lower—but still positive—perception of upskilling and growth support. These findings implied that the organization has effectively cultivated a supportive work environment, particularly in balancing professional and personal responsibilities. This aligns with Tran et al. (2025), who emphasized that supportive policies—especially in communication and work-life balance—enhance employee engagement. Similarly, Boccoli et al. (2023) reported that recognition and development programs positively influenced commitment and morale. Moreover, Jose et al. (2024) linked strong perceptions of organizational support to lower turnover intentions and improved retention rates. This data supported the notion that fostering these HROS factors is instrumental in sustaining employee satisfaction and enhancing organizational performance.

Table 3 presents employee perceptions of job characteristics—a core element of Human Resource Organizational Support (HROS) as operationalized through the lens of Job Characteristics Theory (JCT).

Table 3 *Human Resource Organizational Support in Business Operations*

Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Skill Variety	3.47	.41	Strongly Agree
Task Identity	3.43	.38	Strongly Agree
Task Significance	3.42	.40	Strongly Agree
Autonomy	3.35	.41	Strongly Agree
Feedback	3.39	.46	Strongly Agree
Aggregate	3.41	.41	Strongly Agree

All five indicators—skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—received “Strongly Agree” ratings—the aggregate mean was 3.41—showing consistent perception of well-structured, meaningful, and motivating job roles. The highest-rated item was skill variety ($M = 3.47$), suggesting that employees appreciated opportunities to use multiple skills in their roles—an important contributor to intrinsic motivation. This was followed by task identity and task significance, both of which reflect a sense of completeness and purpose in work, which according to JCT, are directly linked to engagement and satisfaction. Although autonomy received the lowest mean ($M = 3.35$), it still reflected strong agreement, suggesting that decision-making power and self-direction were generally present in employees’ roles.

These findings underscore the importance of job design in shaping employee attitudes. As Abu Orabi et al. (2024) and Martins et al. (2024) have noted, elements such as skill variety and autonomy are critical in enhancing performance and satisfaction. Hasyim and Bakri (2024) further emphasized the motivational value of task clarity and alignment. Locally, Jesus (2024a, 2024b) has affirmed that HR strategies rooted in purposeful job structures have significantly improved commitment in Cebu-based firms. Supporting these insights, Saks (2022) argued that meaningful job characteristics stimulate employee engagement, key to long-term performance and reduced turnover. Overall, the data suggest that Sun Asterisk Development Inc. has successfully implemented job designs that promote not only technical productivity, but also psychological engagement, positioning it well for talent retention and sustained operational success.

Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients and p -values measuring the strength and significance of relationships between Human Resource Organizational Support practices and key dimensions of business operations as conceptualized by Job Characteristics Theory.

Table 4 Significant Correlations Between Human Resource Organizational Support and Business Operations

Hypothesized Path	R-value	p-value	Decision
Recognition and Reward System->Skill Variety	.248	.076	Reject
Recognition and Reward System->Task Identity	.316*	.023	Accept
Recognition and Reward System->Significance	.297*	.032	Accept
Recognition and Reward System->Autonomy	.472**	.000	Accept
Recognition and Reward System->Feedback	.411**	.002	Accept
Communication and Feedback Mechanisms-> Skill Variety	.508**	.000	Accept
Communication and Feedback Mechanisms->Task Identity	.563**	.000	Accept
Communication and Feedback Mechanisms->Task Significance	.597**	.000	Accept
Communication and Feedback Mechanisms->Autonomy	.564**	.000	Accept
Communication and Feedback Mechanisms->Feedback	.460**	.000	Accept
Professional-> Skill Variety	.491**	.000	Accept
Professional->Task Identity	.369**	.007	Accept
Professional->Task Significance	.442**	.001	Accept
Professional-> Autonomy	.454**	.001	Accept
Professional-> Feedback	.400**	.003	Accept
Work-Life Balance-> Skill Variety	.288*	.038	Accept
Work-Life Balance-> Task Identity	.330*	.017	Accept
Work-Life Balance->Task Significance	.321*	.020	Accept
Work-Life Balance-> Autonomy	.551**	.000	Accept
Work-Life Balance->Feedback	.228	.104	Reject
Employee Involvement->Skill Variety	.455**	.001	Accept
Employee Involvement-> Task Identity	.525**	.000	Accept
Employee Involvement-> Task Significance	.504**	.000	Accept
Employee Involvement->Autonomy	.571**	.000	Accept
Employee Involvement->Feedback	.480**	.000	Accept

Note. *Significant at the .05 level; **Significant at the .01 level

The findings demonstrated that most HROS indicators—including recognition, communication, professional development, work-life balance, and employee involvement—exhibited significant positive correlations with operational characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Among the most notable findings, communication mechanisms yielded the strongest correlations, particularly with task significance ($r = .597, p < .001$), autonomy ($r = .564, p < .001$), and task identity ($r = .563, p < .001$). These results suggested that open and effective communication enhances employees' perceptions of role clarity and meaningfulness, which are directly tied to job engagement and motivation under JCT.

Similarly, recognition and reward systems were significantly correlated with autonomy ($r = .472, p < .001$) and feedback ($r = .411, p = .002$), implying that recognition not only boosts morale, but also supports a culture of self-directed performance and constructive evaluation (Karatepe et al., 2022). Professional development consistently showed strong associations across all dimensions, underscoring its integral role in reinforcing core job characteristics and long-term employee commitment (Ahmed et al., 2023). Interestingly, while work-life balance was positively correlated with four operational indicators, its relationship with feedback was not statistically significant ($r = .228, p = .104$), suggesting a possible gap between perceived balance and the quality of performance evaluation. This warrants further exploration into whether flexible work structures unintentionally limit developmental feedback (Yadav et al., 2023).

These patterns align with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that supportive organizational practices encourage reciprocal commitment and effort from employees (Tahir et al., 2024). The results also echoed prior findings that HR systems reinforcing recognition, development, and feedback mechanisms elevated engagement and performance (Ahmed et al., 2023). Locally, organizational analyses emphasized the value of tailored training and structured communication in Cebu-based firms, reinforcing the need for context-specific HR planning (Jesus, 2024c). This data affirmed that robust

HROS practices significantly enhance job design dimensions associated with commitment, motivation, and performance. Organizations should prioritize reinforcing recognition, development, and communication systems to build a sustainable and engaged workforce, driving operational success (Tahir et al., 2024).

Discussion

The findings revealed consistently high employee perceptions across all organizational support indicators; recognition and reward systems, communication mechanisms, professional development, work-life balance, and employee involvement, all fell under the “Strongly Agree” category. Among these, work-life balance received the highest mean score, suggesting that employees highly value flexibility and balance between personal and professional responsibilities. This strong endorsement of support mechanisms reflects a culture of care and attentiveness, which, in line with Social Exchange Theory (SET), fosters a reciprocal sense of obligation, trust, and commitment from employees.

The data further showed that employees perceived their roles as meaningful, skill-enriching, and autonomous, with high scores in skill variety, task identity, autonomy, and feedback. These dimensions, as posited by Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), directly contribute to intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. For instance, when employees experienced control over their work (autonomy) and recognized the importance of their contributions (task significance), they were more likely to be committed and perform at higher levels. The synergy between well-designed job roles and supportive organizational practices created an environment where employees felt empowered, purposeful, and engaged.

Significant correlations between Human Resource Organizational Support factors and core job characteristics reinforced these patterns. Notably, recognition and reward systems showed strong positive correlations with autonomy ($r = .472, p < .001$) and feedback ($r = .411, p = .002$). This supported SET’s core principle of reciprocity—when employees feel acknowledged and trusted, they are more likely to invest in their roles with greater commitment. Similarly, communication mechanisms were strongly associated with task significance ($r = .597, p < .001$), indicating that transparent and participatory communication not only informed but also validated the importance of employees’ roles. This aligns with JCT’s assertion that task significance enhances work meaning and motivation.

Professional development also emerged as a strong driver of employee engagement across all operational dimensions. Employees who received structured learning opportunities were more likely to report higher levels of skill variety, feedback, and task identity, reflecting the empowering role of growth pathways in maintaining commitment. However, the weak correlation between work-life balance and feedback ($r = .228, p = .104$) suggested that while employees appreciated flexible policies, such arrangements may not always be paired with performance guidance. This indicated a need to balance autonomy with structured evaluation to ensure continuous improvement and accountability.

These findings were consistent with prior studies (e.g., Karatepe et al., 2022; Jesus, 2024c), which demonstrated that supportive HR systems, particularly in recognition, communication, and development, positively influence employee loyalty and operational efficiency. They also validated the theoretical propositions of SET, where perceived organizational support encourages emotional and behavioral investment, and JCT where job design fosters internal motivation.

This study confirmed that a dual emphasis on supportive HR practices and enriched job characteristics significantly strengthens employee commitment. Thus, organizations, particularly those in innovation-intensive environments like Sun Asterisk Development Inc., should institutionalize recognition systems, enhance professional growth opportunities, and structure communication channels that validate employee contributions. Doing so not only increases retention and performance but also ensures strategic alignment between workforce behavior and organizational goals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Organizations should prioritize enhancing recognition and reward systems to boost employee autonomy and feedback, fostering motivation and retention. Improving communication and feedback

mechanisms will strengthen employee engagement, while offering targeted professional development opportunities will align skills with organizational needs. A mixed-method approach, combining qualitative insights and quantitative Structural Equation Modeling, can provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these practices on employee commitment and organizational outcomes. Additionally, addressing work-life balance through flexible arrangements and wellness programs could further support employee satisfaction and reduce turnover. These strategies would cultivate a more committed workforce and drive long-term organizational success.

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Perspectives from Resilient Community Enterprise Leaders: Post-Transformation Food Product Innovation Management in Kalasin Province

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: In the context of post-pandemic economic recovery and escalating market competition, community enterprises in Thailand have encountered pressing demands to improve their operational resilience and competitiveness. Food product innovation has become essential for maintaining local economies and ensuring long-term growth. Notwithstanding its significance, there has been limited research on how community enterprises navigate innovation processes in changing contexts. This study sought to identify and analyze the essential elements of food product innovation management as perceived by resilient community enterprise leaders in Kalasin Province, Thailand.

Introduction/Background: The conversion of community enterprises into sustainable and competitive organizations requires incorporating innovation throughout the food production value chain. The paper examined this issue using the Resource-Based View (RBV) paradigm, which asserts that firms can achieve persistent competitive advantage by strategically utilizing valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. In such settings, internal capabilities—such as knowledge, leadership, cooperation, and localized expertise—are crucial for augmenting product innovation. This research examined how effective community enterprise executives utilize these talents to oversee food product innovation in the post-pandemic period.

Methodology: A qualitative research methodology was utilized to obtain comprehensive perspectives from seasoned practitioners. Fifteen leaders of community enterprises were intentionally chosen for their exceptional practices in food product processing and their registration with the Department of Agricultural Extension. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the local Lao dialect, audio-recorded with permission, subsequently transcribed, and back-translated into Thai to guarantee linguistic and contextual precision. Thematic content analysis was employed to analyze this data, encompassing coding, categorization, interpretation, and validation via triangulation and member checking to improve dependability and trustworthiness.

Findings: Eight interconnected elements of food product innovation management were identified. First, research and design include market study, creative conceptualization, product appropriateness, safety, aesthetic appeal, and consultation with external specialists. Secondly, new product development entails methodical planning, differentiating tactics, alignment with trends, and preparedness for resources and labor. Third, existing product improvements involve refining flavor, packaging, quality, and nutritional value in accordance with changing consumer preferences. Fourth, value enhancement concentrates on cultivating product distinctiveness, identity, perceived worth, and strategic resource allocation. Fifth, the innovation process involves use of novel technologies, optimized workflows, digital assimilation, and process re-engineering. Sixth, collaboration emphasizes shared responsibility, collective motivation, internal coordination, and reciprocal advantages among organizational members. Seventh, work support encompasses internal consultation, mentoring, opportunity discovery, and procedures for organizational learning. Finally, transportation and supply chain management encompass logistics optimization, quality control in distribution, customer service, and punctual delivery. The effective amalgamation of these elements allows community firms to

maintain agility, responsiveness to customers, and competitive differentiation in a swiftly evolving business landscape.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This study enhances the growing dialogue on grassroots innovation and community-oriented enterprise growth. This expands the resource-based view theory by situating it inside a rural micro-enterprise context, demonstrating how internal capabilities and locally embedded resources can be utilized for strategic innovation. The practical ramifications encompass food security, sustainable livelihoods, and decentralized economic growth. The results emphasize that innovation does not require advanced technology to be effective; instead, contextual relevance, stakeholder involvement, and adaptive leadership can produce similarly significant results.

Recommendations: Practitioners ought to prioritize knowledge enhancement, market-oriented innovation, and collaborative platforms that promote idea generation and capability exchanges. Government and affiliated agencies are urged to furnish technical training, marketing assistance, and logistical infrastructure to support local innovation ecosystems. Academics should employ mixed method approaches in future investigations to quantify the causal links between innovation components and corporate performance metrics. Cross-regional comparisons can yield more generalizability and insights into inventive scalability. The principal limitation of this study lies in its qualitative approach and limited geographical reach. Although the purposive sample provided extensive contextual insights, the findings may not be indicative of all community companies or relevant to other industries or regions. Moreover, the analysis of interview data may be influenced by researcher bias or constraints in participant memory and expression.

Research Limitation: Subsequent investigations should analyze the individual traits, organizational dynamics, and environmental elements that influence food product innovation in community companies. Utilizing quantitative or mixed-method research methodologies, such as confirmatory factor analysis, would facilitate the validation of the eight components identified in this work, permit regional comparisons, and elucidate the evolution of innovation capacity under varying policies or market situations. Consideration must also be afforded to the influence of digital technology, sustainability practices, and leadership styles in driving corporate transformation within the post-transformation economy. These methodologies would augment the legitimacy, applicability, and practical significance of findings, providing essential recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to fortify robust and adaptive community enterprises.

Keywords: *Food product innovation management, communal enterprise, post-transformation*

Introduction

Community enterprises are one example of ventures that can generate returns for local individuals and society. Government support for these enterprises has facilitated business expansion in various forms. In the post-COVID-19 economic climate, community enterprises must adapt rapidly to recover. This can be achieved by prioritizing environmentally friendly products, waste reduction, resilience building, and network development. Furthermore, an innovative management plan for products is essential, and crucial for transforming crises into opportunities and ensuring future sustainability.

For Kalasin, a province located in the northeastern part of Thailand, its community enterprises also need to enhance their products and create differentiation to increase income and operational potential (Hanifah et al., 2019). Moreover, to establish sustainability and advance to a higher level of business, products need to have value added (Parinyasutinun, 2019). The current challenge for community enterprises in Kalasin Province is managing products that are not in demand (Jintana & Puripanik, 2020). The ramifications of this issue extend beyond economics, encompassing food security, household incomes, and sustainable livelihoods. These findings emphasize that tackling insufficient market demand via systematic innovation not only reinstates competitiveness but also safeguards household incomes and fortifies communal food security over time.

When items fail to generate market demand, revenue-generating potential declines and competitiveness wanes. Establishing a food product innovation management framework helps improve competitiveness by explicitly associating innovation with economic and social value. Product development and customer base expansion are essential for community enterprises to attain sustained growth (Hyytinen et al., 2015). This is particularly true in relation to the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which underscores the importance of leveraging valuable and distinctive resources to innovate and enhance products, thereby differentiating them from competitors and strengthening competitive advantage for sustainable customer base growth.

This study employs the term “post-transformation” to characterize the social and economic landscape following the COVID-19 pandemic, when community companies faced challenges related to economic recovery, as well as significant structural transformations in production, marketing, and leadership. This stage involves long-term adaptation techniques to enhance the capabilities and competitiveness of community enterprises, highlighting the essential role of adaptive leadership in accordance with local development conditions. Since 2021, this era has marked a gradual shift towards more sustainable and innovative commercial methods among communities.

The RBV philosophy underscores the strategic use of valuable and distinctive resources to create a competitive advantage. This entails advancing creative production methodologies (Barney, 1991) and applying novel management strategies (Ng et al., 2020) within the food sector, which is vital for human existence and significantly impacts the economy and society. Efficient food product management is essential for guaranteeing food security, reducing shortages, enhancing hygiene, and the quality of life. Consequently, it is imperative to develop a sustainable and balanced food system for the future, especially in managing food product innovations, which is currently a salient area of focus.

Prior research has concentrated on formulating culinary recipes, package aesthetics, and incorporating indigenous ingredients. Sahdev et al. (2022) underscored the significance of product innovation, whereas Vassallo et al. (2023) examined the amalgamation of traditional knowledge with innovation to improve sustainability across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The elements of food product innovation management encompass developing novel products, formulating new production processes, building new organizations, implementing innovative management practices, and enhancing current products (Chiffolleau & Dourian, 2020).

Research on food product innovation management in community companies is insufficient, despite its significance for local economic development and business expansion. Nonetheless, comprehending and investigating the intricate details of food product innovation management in community enterprises, as well as advancing sustainable business practices within the community, is essential (Community Enterprise Promotion Division, 2022). Continuous development and promotion are vital for the effective management of food goods. This entails developing new products and evaluating production methods prior to market launch to guarantee consumer acceptability (Sethi et al., 2012).

Despite growing academic interest in community enterprises, research examining the perception and implementation of specific components of food product innovation management in rural contexts remains limited, particularly in the post-transformation period. Most existing research has focused on financial outcomes or general innovation frameworks, leaving unanswered questions about the strategic practices that community enterprise leaders employ to build resilience and sustainability.

Research Question

What are the components of food product innovation management in the post-transformation period, and how are they perceived and integrated by community enterprise leaders in Kalasin Province to enhance resilience and competitiveness?

This study focused on analyzing the components of food product innovation management, focusing on the perspectives of resilient community enterprise leaders. These elements serve as support mechanisms that enable community enterprises to add value to their local food products and enhance their long-term management capabilities, while also being linked to the sustainability of their communities. The findings provide insights into how leaders can turn crises into opportunities, foster adaptive leadership, and achieve sustainable progress during uncertain times.

Literature Review

The post-transformation period after the COVID-19 crisis has profoundly influenced the world economy (Rintanalert & Sirisunhirun, 2021). These impacts span all facets of human existence, particularly regarding health, travel limitations, lockdowns, and numerous other measures (Saputra & Herlina, 2021). Many firms are confronting survival issues, while various community enterprises are attempting to adjust to their altered environments, hence experiencing pressure in multiple operational domains (Zaverzhenets & Łobacz, 2021).

Kalasin Province, abundant in cultural diversity and natural resources, is predominantly dependent on agriculture, yielding a range of crops and fishery products. (Kalasin Provincial Agricultural Office, 2023). Moreover, agriculture can bolster local economies and create products that are aligned with market demands, thus guaranteeing future sustainability. Numerous studies in Thailand have emphasized community enterprises in the Northeast, especially in Kalasin Province, where local resources facilitate food processing that embodies cultural heritage and sustains livelihoods.

Contemporary leaders utilize indigenous knowledge and resources, such as wild fish, to develop distinctive products that satisfy current market requirements. Integrating online and offline marketing strategies enhances competitiveness while maintaining local identity (Intalar et al., 2018). Resilient leadership is an essential element in fostering organizational and community resilience, particularly during crises. Previous studies have demonstrated that resilient leaders promote adaptability via effective decision-making, emotional intelligence, and social mobilization. In community enterprises, such leadership fosters collaboration, information exchange, and collective action, thus promoting innovation and sustainability (Dodds et al., 2018; Jintana & Puripanik, 2020; Sihvola et al., 2022).

These findings correspond with paradigms like shared leadership and complex adaptive leadership, which highlight distributed responsibility and adaptability to dynamic situations. Previous studies have repeatedly highlighted that a robust food product innovation management framework, comprising eight elements, is essential for bolstering resilience in community companies (Hanifah et al., 2019; Ng et al., 2020; Parinyasutinun, 2019). The components of research and design, new product creation, existing product enhancement, value addition, innovation processes, collaboration, functional support, and logistics and supply chain management synergistically enhance adaptability and long-term sustainability. Studies have indicated that research and design, in conjunction with new product development, improve agility in adapting to evolving market expectations (Hyytinen et al., 2015). Enhancing products and adding value sustain competitiveness while safeguarding cultural identity (Delgado et al., 2023). Innovation processes and collaboration facilitate knowledge dissemination and community empowerment, which are crucial for resilience in times of crisis (Leonidou et al., 2020). Functional support offers organizational stability, while logistics and supply chain management aid uninterrupted market access, even with external disturbances like COVID-19 (Sudan & Taggar 2021).

Collectively, these eight factors constitute a cohesive framework that enhances competitiveness while directly associating innovation with resilience, food security, and sustainable livelihoods in community enterprises. Community enterprises can attain long-term resilience and sustainability by integrating effective research and product design (Ng et al., 2020), diversifying new products (Hyytinen et al., 2015), enhancing existing products (Hanifah et al., 2019), adding value through quality and eco-friendly practices (Delgado et al., 2023), fostering collaboration (Jintana & Puripanik, 2020), providing functional support (Intalar et al., 2018), and strengthening logistics (Leonidou et al., 2020).

The Resource-Based View paradigm is a crucial notion in organizational product creation, particularly in its emphasis of cultivating innovative concepts to direct strategic initiatives (Porter, 1990). This corresponds with Barney's (1991) theory, which underscored the need to use existing resources to generate value and competitive advantages, especially in the development of goods that satisfy customer demands and contemporary management practices. Moreover, it recognizes as crucial the ability to conduct research management in the innovation of quality food products. Recent research by Kariv et al. (2024) highlighted the imperative of enabling emerging entrepreneurs in product creation and innovation, aligning with the RBV philosophy. Furthermore, research conducted by Salim et al. (2020) revealed that advantageous enhancements can be realized by methodically

evaluating the potential of green product innovations in conjunction with green process innovations to achieve enhanced efficiency in a swiftly evolving technological landscape.

The integration of viewpoints inside the RBV theory suggests that it can function as a fundamental framework for subsequent research on innovation management. Alongside the RBV framework, the literature illustrates that food security and sustainable livelihoods are pivotal in the integration of food product innovation management across multiple dimensions, such as product development, local resource utilization, and the establishment of product identity for enterprise sustainability.

Food product innovation management encompasses the marketing and communication of novel products and services, with the objective of fostering beneficial societal transformations. Vassallo et al. (2023) defined innovation as the amalgamation of old knowledge and modern techniques, with the objective of promoting long-term sustainability and generating favorable economic, social, and environmental results. Misra and Mention (2022) defined food innovation as incorporating customers into the innovation process, advancement of the food value chain, and administration of food research and development. Food product innovation entails the development of food items using creativity and advanced technology to improve value and quality, meet customer demands, and yield beneficial results for the economy, society, and the environment. Leonidou et al. (2020) contended that research and design, product development, and improvement of existing products are critical processes bolstered by collaboration and implementation of innovations. The augmentation of value and efficiency in operations promotes good product management, encompassing transportation and supply chain management (Intalar et al., 2018). The literature underscores the need to analyze how community entrepreneurs oversee several facets of food product innovation.

Methodology

Research Design

Overseeing food product innovation within community enterprises necessitates a systematic strategy that addresses the intricacies of leaders' viewpoints (Blumenthal & Jensen, 2019). This study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews to facilitate an in-depth examination of attitudes, experiences, and decision-making processes (Bell et al., 2022). This method was particularly suitable, given the study's emphasis on resilience and adaptive leadership. The interview technique was established based on prior research and enhanced with feedback from three academic experts to enhance content validity. Open-ended inquiries addressed essential subjects including product creation, cooperation, innovation processes, and leadership adaptability (Table 1). Participants were urged to expand upon and clarify their comments to enhance the acquisition of varied and contextually relevant data.

Rigorous ethical standards were maintained. The interview process received approval from the Human Ethics Committee at Kalasin University (HS-KSU 001/2021, Exemption Review). Participants were thoroughly informed of the study's objectives, methodologies, and their rights, including the ability to withdraw at any moment. Informed consent was acquired in writing, and confidentiality was preserved by ensuring the anonymity of all participants. Each interview lasted roughly 20 minutes and was conducted in the local tongue to foster a natural environment and reduce potential language prejudice. The interviews were transcribed and translated into Thai by a bilingual expert utilizing a back-translation method (Brislin, 1970) to verify accuracy. Data triangulation was employed by comparing interview data with community enterprise papers and government reports, thereby augmenting the reliability and credibility of the research findings.

Sample and Scope

Fifteen community enterprise leaders in the food product sector in Kalasin Province participated in the interviews. These leaders were from community enterprises registered with the Department of Agricultural Extension (Community Enterprise Promotion Division, 2022). They were purposively selected based on their exemplary practices and proven track records in food business management. The selection included 15 community enterprise groups operating food processing, dried food, and fresh food businesses to ensure diversity in product types and operating environments.

Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because the objective was not to draw general statistical conclusions, but to gain insights from a rich case study. The study focused on leaders recognized for their effective and innovative practices to ensure that the data collected reflected real-world experiences, successful strategies, and challenges associated with managing food product innovation. This approach highlighted best practices and provided a comprehensive understanding of how community enterprises in Kalasin Province build resilience and sustainability. Furthermore, the purposeful sampling enhanced the findings' credibility, as the selected leaders were well-positioned to provide reliable and contextual perspectives. They are acknowledged for their exemplary operational procedures.

The scope criteria encompassed essential qualifications: (a) firstly, official registration and operation for a minimum of three years; (b) secondly, prominence in food processing, specifically fish processing, a traditional practice rooted in local knowledge; and (c) lastly, the capacity to generate income for the community and enhance food product security. The selection of these groups enabled the research to concentrate intensively on Kalasin's economically significant villages, especially those adjacent to Lam Pao Dam, which are engaged in fishing and fish processing. All responders manufactured processed fish products, encompassing fermented fish, fermented fish cakes, and dried fish. These goods embody local knowledge and identity while significantly contributing to food security and sustainable revenue for the community. This connection facilitated the administration of food product innovation across economic, social, and cultural aspects.

Data Analysis

Step 1: Transcription—Convert the audio of the interview into text for analytical purposes, ensuring that the material is precise and comprehensive.

Step 2: Categorization and Coding—Segment the acquired data into categories (themes) to enhance analysis.

Step 3: Content Analysis—Examine the data through interpretative procedures (interpretation and conclusion), with an emphasis on identifying trends seen in the responses.

Step 4: Data Validation—Examine the data with the group to confirm the information's accuracy prior to advancing to the outcomes.

Table 1 *Framework of Interview Inquiries*

Structure	Questions	References
Food Product Innovation Management	PI1. How does the enterprise develop new products that are completely different from the current ones?	Zahay et al. (2018), Makanyeza et al. (2022), Apanasovich et al. (2016), Bourke and Roper (2017)
	PI2. How does the enterprise innovate its current products?	
	PI3. How does the enterprise engage in research, innovation, design?	
	PI4. What are the procedures and guidelines for the enterprise in developing new products?	
	PI5. How does the enterprise conduct research to plan for product improvement?	
	PI6. How does the enterprise currently enhance the value of existing products?	
	PI7. How does the enterprise improve existing products through changes such as appearance, packaging, and volume?	
	PI8. How does the enterprise promote teamwork and collaborative efforts?	
	PI9. How has the enterprise undergone changes in management processes that are innovative?	
	PI10. How does the enterprise apply modern management principles within the organization, such as in production and marketing?	
	PI11. How does the enterprise manage the transportation of products safely and punctually?	

Results

The research findings revealed that while all Community Enterprise Leaders functioned within the fish processing sector, their innovative techniques differed based on the specific products that they oversee. This diversity offers significant insights into the various tactics that affect the resilience of community enterprises in Kalasin Province, as delineated in Table 2. The producers of fermented fish emphasized the transmission of traditional knowledge and quality assurance to guarantee cultural preservation and household food security. Producers of sour fish implemented contemporary packaging and sanitary requirements to satisfy evolving consumer preferences, enhance reputation, and ensure ongoing revenue. Fish cake producers prioritized diversification, value-added production, and digital marketing to improve competitiveness and engage younger demographics. Desiccated fish producers prioritized effective storage and strong logistical systems to maintain long-term market stability and minimize waste.

The varying methods illustrate that community enterprise resilience is not founded on a singular strategy, but rather on context-specific innovations that cater to both cultural traditions and market demands.

Table 2 *Types of Processed Fish Products, Principal Innovation Practices, and Impact on Resilience*

Category of Product	Fundamental Innovation Strategies	Influence on Resilience
Fermented Fish (Pla Ra)	– Transmission of traditional fermenting expertise – Mobilization of community labor – Rigorous quality assurance	– Maintains cultural identity – Guarantees food safety – Enhances domestic food security
Fermented Fish (Pla Som)	– Diversification of products and enhancement of value – Implementation of novel processing techniques – Advancement via digital marketing	– Broadens market accessibility – Enhances competitive edge – Fosters young engagement and innovation
Desiccated Fish	– Effective conservation methods – Enhanced logistics and distribution systems – Emphasis on product shelf stability	– Ensures consistent market access – Minimizes spoilage and waste – Guarantees long-term income stability

The interview data analyzed indicated that the primary components and sub-components of food product innovation management were as follows.

1) Research and Design: The sub-components encompassed the quest for information, necessity for innovation, creation, appropriateness, convenience, coherence, aesthetic cleanliness, safety, expert counsel, and networking (93.33%). The process of food product innovation commenced with research, conception, and redesign, focusing on consumer expectations and market trends, including flavor and nutritional content. The process of innovation and development may entail the utilization of novel components or technologies, as demonstrated in the subsequent interviews.

We send members to participate in training, exchange knowledge, and observe new markets in order to develop along the pathways that are deemed successful, but we must consider the market to see how many buyers there are. (CEO1)

We produce new products without building on existing ones, using new raw materials and following customer trends, with support from the government. (CEO15)

We must start by clearly exploring the market to identify any gaps or problems that we can address. Only then can we plan the development of a product that is not only different but also meets the needs more effectively than before. (CEO8)

2) New Product Development: The sub-components encompass the creation of new items, innovation, differentiation, enhancement of existing products, strategic planning, market exploration, readiness, and manpower (86.67%). New product development commences with market research to identify distinguishing factors and potential areas for improvement. This entails enhancing the quality of existing items and integrating innovative features, as demonstrated in the interview excerpts.

We continually have plans to develop new products by leveraging our expertise and establishing connections with both the public and private sectors, as well as planning to test new products. (CEO4)

The new product should arise from creative thinking that leads to differentiation and adds value to the market. Prepare the necessary resources and a capable team to drive the project to success in accordance with its objectives. (CEO9)

3) Existing Products Improvement: The sub-components are market demand and increased options (100%). The improvement of aligning existing products with market demands provides consumers with more options by enhancing the quality or characteristics of the original products. This includes adjustments to taste, development of packaging, or increasing nutritional value, as demonstrated in the interviews below.

We have modernized the appearance of the original product to enhance marketing opportunities. (CEO7)

Improving existing products should focus on enhancing quality, reducing costs, or aligning with current consumer demands. (CEO10)

4) Value Enhancement: The sub-components comprise uniqueness, value, popularity, and adequate resources (73.00%). Augmenting product value underscores the enhancement of distinctiveness and the elevation of worth across multiple dimensions.

We must consider both the market demand and the potential of the available resources. Good management will enable us to develop sustainably. (CEO11)

It is important to create a clear identity for the product so that customers feel we are unique and truly fulfill their needs. (CEO1)

5) Innovation Process: The components encompass the addition of steps, the reduction of work processes, the utilization of new tools, and the implementation of new technologies (93.00%). The revised procedure emphasizes improving operational efficiency through the modification of manufacturing phases, accelerating processes, and eliminating errors, as illustrated in the subsequent interviews.

Workers must have discipline and responsibility in their work, be willing to learn, and share tasks among themselves. (CEO1)

The changes in circumstances, such as COVID-19, have resulted in a shortage of skilled labor; however, we have shifted to selling online more extensively. (CEO3)

6) Collaboration: The components include motivation, encouragement, advancement, support, advice, teamwork, and mutual advantages (80%). Collaboration is prioritized, concentrating on the distribution of duties among group members to attain shared objectives. Encouraging and boosting members are essential measures to harness their full potential. The assistance and direction offered by the staff improved overall work efficiency, as demonstrated in the subsequent interviews.

Members are assigned tasks according to their strengths and collaborate in the same area. (CEO5)

We distribute dividends to members from sales by accumulating funds from investments. (CEO12)

7) Work Support: The sub-components encompass consultation, support, opportunity identification, and problem-solving (86.67%). Work support entails offering guidance and aid to the team in pursuing new prospects, while also facilitating seamless communication and improving work processes, as demonstrated in the subsequent interviews.

We produce goods every day to ensure there is no shortage, even with stock production during the COVID period. (CEO8)

We must be ready to listen to problems and seek appropriate solutions in order to ensure smoother and more effective operations. (CEO6)

The important aspect of assisting in work is the pursuit of new opportunities that allow everyone to develop together. It is not merely about solving existing problems, but also about collectively looking ahead to create progress in our attempts. (CEO12)

8) Transportation and Supply Chain Management: The sub-components encompass procedures, management, control, addressing needs, services, and transportation (66.67%). Transportation and supply chain management involves overseeing and regulating the transportation of goods and raw materials from production sites to sales locations. This is motivated by the necessity to guarantee that management is executed efficiently, promptly, and securely, in a timely and comprehensive manner, as demonstrated in the subsequent interviews.

Transportation according to the purchase order includes free shipping services for bulk orders, while customers are responsible for shipping costs for smaller orders. (CEO11)

Product transportation management must ensure that every process from the origin to the destination is conducted safely and with quality. (CEO6)

An analysis of the eight components of food product innovation management demonstrates the mechanisms through which community enterprises in Kalasin Province strengthen their resilience and sustainability. Research and design, particularly the development of new products, reflect the strong internal capabilities of these enterprises, enabling them to respond effectively to dynamic consumer demands and evolving market conditions. This capacity is reinforced by product improvement and value addition, which strategically employs local resources to enhance competitiveness while safeguarding cultural identity.

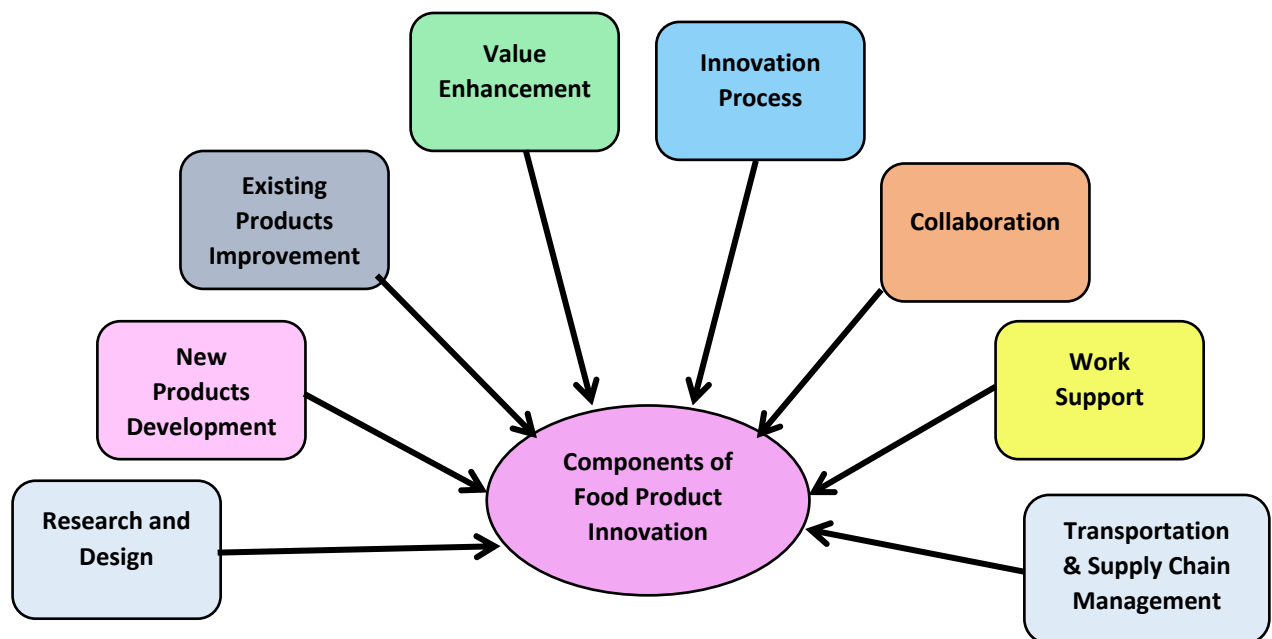
In parallel, the implementation of innovation processes and the promotion of collaboration highlight the importance of adaptive leadership, whereby community leaders consolidate knowledge, encourage collective problem-solving, and establish networks both within and across communities. These networks are crucial in facilitating resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and risk reduction, thus fostering a culture of mutual empowerment.

Complementing these aspects, work support and the effective management of transportation and supply chains ensure production stability, minimize losses, and secure sustainable access to markets, thereby strengthening food security and supporting long-term community livelihoods. Findings from interviews further reveal that community enterprise leaders prioritize food security across all eight components by setting quality standards, enhancing product nutrition, mitigating production risks, and fostering collaborative networks. Resilient leadership practices were also evident, enabling enterprises to adapt successfully to shifting economic and social contexts.

Collectively, the eight interconnected components—(a) research and design, (b) new product development, (c) improvement of existing products, (d) value enhancement, (e) innovation processes, (f) collaboration, (g) work support, and (h) transportation and supply chain management—form a comprehensive system that not only enhances internal capabilities but also aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV). This alignment underscores the strategic importance of unique, valuable, and inimitable resources in establishing long-term competitiveness and resilience for community enterprises.

Thus, the components of food product innovation management research design include new product development, existing product improvement, value enhancement, innovation processes, collaboration, support work, and transportation and supply chains, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *The Components of Food Product Innovation Management*



Discussion

The administration of food product innovation encompasses essential elements such as research design, new product development, existing product improvement, value enhancement, innovation processes, collaboration, work support, transportation, and supply chain management (Hanifah et al., 2019; Ng et al., 2020; Parinyasutinun, 2019). Interviews with 15 leaders of community enterprises in Kalasin Province validated the practical implementation of all eight components within their local environment. Leaders indicated that training, expert consultation, and direct market observation were crucial in informing product creation, as articulated by one CEO: “We must begin by thoroughly examining the market to identify any gaps or issues we can address” (CEO8).

Leaders modify research and design to address consumer requirements, create new products utilizing local resources, and enhance existing products for safety and competitiveness (Hyytinen et al., 2015). This illustrated responsiveness to consumer desires while upholding nutritional and safety criteria. Leaders promoted value enhancement through sustainable packaging and the preservation of cultural identity (Parinyasutinun, 2019; Delgado et al., 2023). For instance, certain executives emphasized the modernization of packaging and the development of distinctive product identities to both maintain cultural traditions and improve competitiveness (CEO7; CEO11). They underscored the importance of community collaboration and information exchange, alongside supply chain support and management, which are vital for food security and sustained market access (Intalar et al., 2018; Leonidou et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders indicated a transition to online sales and a reallocation of responsibilities among team members, demonstrating flexibility and adaptive leadership ability (CEO3; CEO5; CEO12).

This research illustrates that community enterprise resilience is not solely a theoretical notion but a pragmatic strategy that amalgamates local knowledge with contemporary market requirements (Jintana & Puripanik, 2020; Sihvola et al., 2022). The term *Resilient Community Enterprise Leaders* in this study highlights how leaders' adaptive practices—such as active learning, collaborative problem-solving, and rapid crisis response—enable enterprises to endure external shocks and convert challenges into opportunities for sustainable development. This application demonstrates the incorporation of resilience principles into leadership and innovation management approaches revealed in the interviews.

The results of the essential elements correspond with the RBV theory posited by Barney (1991), as community enterprises exhibited a flexible management framework that enables leaders to engage

directly with members, promoting comprehension and transparent practices (Jintana & Puripanik, 2020). Ordonez-Ponce et al. (2021) further illustrated that the RBV framework underscores the incentives and values linked to sustainable resource utilization. Furthermore, research conducted by Gibson et al. (2021) indicated that the geographical positioning of a community constitutes a significant, unique, inimitable, and indispensable resource. Furthermore, Somwethee et al. (2023) asserted that leadership and management, proactive learning, and analysis contribute to sustainable development. Transportation and supply chain management facilitate operations to comprehensively meet demands (Intalar et al., 2018; Leonidou et al., 2020). Interview data corroborated that effective logistics and daily production plans were essential for maintaining food availability, especially amid such crises (CEO8; CEO11). This underscores the significance of logistics in ensuring food security and stable household finances. Moreover, a study by Delgado et al. (2023) in Colombia revealed that a majority of nations in the Americas and the Caribbean depend on the advancement of agricultural products.

Prior studies have predominantly concentrated on domains such as new product development, innovation processes, organizational culture, leadership, creativity, dynamic capacities, business model innovation, research and development, and green innovation (Tuan et al., 2016). This study contributes to the existing literature by illustrating the practical application of the eight components in fostering resilience, agility, and flexibility among community companies. Each component—spanning research and design to logistics—exerts a unique influence: research and design augment agility; product enhancement and value addition sustain competitiveness while safeguarding cultural identity; collaboration and innovation processes cultivate adaptive leadership; and logistics and support functions ensure food security and long-term sustainability. This research reveals novel insights from community enterprises in Kalasin Province. It enhances understanding by contextualizing the eight components of innovation management, illustrating their overall impact on food security, household income, and sustainable lives. The findings indicate that adaptive leadership, based on community participation and resource utilization, is essential for improving resilience. These contributions correspond with the RBV framework, highlighting the significance of utilizing important and inimitable local resources to maintain long-term competitiveness and community welfare.

Conclusion, Practical Implications, and Future Research

Conclusion

This study, based on the Resource-Based Perspective, emphasizes that community enterprise resilience and sustainability depend on effectively integrating eight key elements of food product innovation management. Research and design, coupled with new product development, enable companies to rapidly respond to changing consumer demands while enhancing existing products to ensure sustainability in a competitive marketplace. Adding value through premium local ingredients and sustainable packaging reinforces cultural identity and consumer appeal. Innovation and collaboration processes cultivate adaptive leadership and knowledge sharing, fostering shared potential for risk reduction. Supporting work, coupled with efficient logistics and supply chain management, ensures production stability, minimizes losses, and maintains reliable market access. By leveraging these eight interconnected elements, community enterprises can transform their internal knowledge and resources into valuable, rare, and inimitable assets, leading to sustainable growth, sustainable competitiveness, and adaptability in a post-transformation context.

Practical Implications

The findings of this research offer actionable strategies for community enterprises and policymakers. Adding value to products through the integration of premium, locally sourced ingredients and sustainable packaging can enhance market attractiveness and consumer trust. Fostering collaboration and teamwork accelerates innovation and knowledge exchange, while adopting digital technologies improves operational efficiency by improving task organization and data management. Furthermore, strengthening transportation and supply chain systems ensures timely

and reliable deliveries, enhancing both market stability and competitiveness. Collectively, these practices enable community enterprises to be agile enough to address emerging challenges and maintain their competitive position in an ever-changing marketplace.

Future Research

Future research should prioritize analysis of the individual traits that influence food product innovation and the effects of innovation management strategies on community business members. To do this, it is recommended to utilize quantitative or mixed-method study methods to discover appropriate management techniques, enable comparisons with businesses in other locations, and examine management approaches in the post-transformation. Qualitative research, reliant on interviews and observations, may be susceptible to interpretations shaped by research bias and limited by the researchers' experiences and perspectives.

This study offers qualitative insights into the eight elements of food product innovation management; however, subsequent research should prioritize statistical validation, specifically employing confirmatory factor analysis to verify the eight components of the conceptual framework. This quantitative validation would enhance the credibility and relevance of the research findings across various community enterprise contexts, thereby augmenting the potential for policy and practical implications.

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Participation, Appreciation, and Learning Effectiveness of the University of Antique's Market Day Activity: A Mediation Analysis

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: Traditional business education methods are insufficient for developing competent future business leaders and successful entrepreneurs. It has been observed that current academic practices in business programs emphasize theories more than real-world application. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), a Philippine government agency that regulates and governs higher educational institutions, has instituted many programs and initiatives to improve the quality of marketing education, ensuring that business schools sufficiently equip students for a dynamic and continually changing corporate landscape. In close collaboration with industry partners, CHED formulated a curriculum for the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in Marketing Management (BSBA-MM) Program that emphasizes experiential learning activities and encourages business schools to integrate marketing education with other disciplines, promoting a comprehensive grasp of the sector and developing versatile abilities. Because of the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the BSBA-MM Program at the University of Antique, Philippines, introduced a Market Day Activity on a simulation platform. The interactions between participation in, appreciation of, and the effectiveness of these learning styles led to the formulation of the study's research questions.

Introduction/Background: This study investigated the interplay among Activity Participation (AP), Activity Appreciation (AA), and Learning Effectiveness (LE). It has been observed by some researchers that active student engagement in learning activities promotes better understanding and retention. Furthermore, they have established that active student engagement in their activities leads students to appreciate their learning activities, resulting in enhanced learning outcomes, and some believe that this appreciation of their learning activities influences their motivation (Samad et al., 2021).

Methodology: The Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in Marketing Management (BSBA-MM) Program under the College of Business and Accountancy accommodates approximately 350 students across all academic year levels. Using a quantitative research design and employing simple random sampling, data were gathered from 252 BSBA-MM students who joined the 2023-2024 2nd semester Market Day Activity. A researcher-developed instrument was used in this study. An *F*-test power analysis indicated that the minimum sample size to yield a statistical power of 95 percent with an alpha of .05 and an effect size of ($d=.30$) was 252. A mediation analysis approach was employed to measure the interrelationships between student activity appreciation, participation, and learning effectiveness within the context of the BSBA-MM Program's Market Day Activity.

Findings: The results showed that Activity Participation (AP) significantly and positively affected Activity Appreciation (AA) ($\beta = .676, t = 11.652, p < .000$), while AP had a moderately positive influence on Learning Effectiveness (LE) ($\beta = .542, t = 7.749, p < .000$). This indicated that respondents with higher levels of participation (AP) showed more appreciation (AA) for Market Day Activity. Participation also had a significant direct and positive influence on learning effectiveness ($\beta = .138, t = .080, p < .042$). Meanwhile, the indirect effect of activity participation (AP) on learning effectiveness (LE) ($\beta = .366, t = 6.018, p < .000$) was partially mediated. Furthermore, these results revealed that AP

impacted learning effectiveness, suggesting that encouraging students to actively participate in the Market Day Activity can lead to a stronger appreciation of and perceived importance of it, which may eventually be converted into positive learning outcomes. This emphasizes the idea that when such activities are embraced by students, one benefit of such active engagement is positive learning experiences.

Contribution/Impact on Society: By understanding the interplay among variables, educators and program administrators of the BSBA-MM Program may consider introducing policies that are based on the study's conclusions. It further suggests that in addition to student participation, other factors such as activity appreciation and learning effectiveness can drive positive educational outcomes and contribute to the overall success of the programs. Instructors should implement activities that encourage active participation, which leads to increased appreciation for the activity and contributes to students' overall academic success. These interplays will eventually translate into creating competent and effective workers, marketers, or entrepreneurs.

Recommendations: Program administrators, educators and other stakeholders of higher educational institutions should develop strategies to foster a supportive climate that encourages student participation and appreciation, as this in turn can enhance overall learning outcomes. By promoting participatory programs and active academic activities, college instructors can foster deeper student appreciation of activities, thereby producing graduates who are competent and effective business administrators and entrepreneurs. These factors are needed to succeed in the marketing industry.

Research Limitation: The research was conducted within a single program, and the findings may not be applicable to other academic programs, either within the university or elsewhere. Follow-up research on the relationships analyzed in this study across various academic programs or institutions would improve the generalizability of the results.

Future Research: Future research may integrate objective assessments of learning outcomes to validate these results. If causal inference methods were employed in future studies, this would enhance the robustness of these findings, as the cross-sectional nature of the data restricts the capacity to establish such relationships.

Keywords: *Participation, appreciation, learning effectiveness, Market Day Activity*

Introduction

Marketing education is essential in equipping students for rapidly evolving corporate environments (Talafo, 2021). Confucius' teachings indicate that engaging students in hands-on, experiential learning is essential for thoroughly comprehending a topic's principles and their practical application (Zhiyong, 2023).

Traditional business education methods are insufficient for developing competent future business leaders and successful entrepreneurs (Bedawy, 2017). Business schools have historically been criticized for emphasizing theoretical concepts at the expense of practical application, leading to an increasing focus on incorporating active learning methodologies, including case studies, simulations, and real-world projects, to improve student engagement and knowledge retention (Perusso & Baaken, 2020). Experiential learning or learning by doing, for example, involves students actively participating in experiences and applying classroom concepts to practical scenarios (Bedawy, 2017). Activity-Based Learning theory emphasizes the central role of engaging activities in facilitating meaningful learning experiences. Learners actively gain knowledge through direct activities encouraging exploration, experimentation, and reflection. Immersive learning experiences allow students to directly implement marketing principles, cultivate their skills, and comprehensively understand the significance of the field within the larger business framework (Cummins & Johnson, 2021). According to this theory, students' active engagement in simulated business scenarios during Market Day activities in the BSBA-MM Program promotes a more profound comprehension and application of theoretical concepts.

In order to guide the development of marketing education in the Philippines, the role of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is essential. CHED has been responding to a dynamic, fast-paced, and ever-changing corporate landscape with rigorous programs and initiatives to provide students with the highest quality of marketing education (Lazanas & Urbina, 2023). By prioritizing hands-on experiential learning opportunities, the BSBA-MM program works closely with CHED in developing an industry-based curriculum. CHED advocates for business schools to integrate marketing education with other disciplines like entrepreneurship, tourism, or other business-related disciplines, which promote a grasp of the sector that helps develop students' abilities (Tan & Vicente, 2019). CHED has also introduced quality assurance of learning assessment and program accreditation to ensure top-notch marketing training that adheres to industry standards and guarantees employment (Pantao, 2021). Marketing programs must constantly change to address ever-changing corporate platforms so that graduates will be ready for the workforce (Spanjaard et al., 2018).

The University of Antique's BSBA-MM major serves as a pillar of teaching marketing concepts and how they may be applied in Antique Province. To enhance student involvement, knowledge retention, and real-world preparedness, the university has purposely initiated a Market Day Activity since 2018. This experiential learning is aligned with the university's mission to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and the real world, which empowers students to apply marketing strategies and develop skills necessary for changing business environments.

In this study, the interplay of activity participation, activity appreciation, and learning effectiveness of the Market Day Activity in the University of Antique's BSBA-Marketing Management Program were investigated.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of student participation in Market Day activities.
2. To evaluate student appreciation of Market Day as a learning experience.
3. To determine Market Day's effectiveness in enhancing marketing knowledge and practical skills.
4. To examine the relationships among activity participation, appreciation, and perceived learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Experiential Learning, Social Learning, Digital Marketing in Business Education, and University-Industry Context in the Philippines

Active participation, thinking, and attention are practical factors recommended by the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) to help students develop the decision-making and problem-solving skills essential for business education. Activities like *Market Day* help students transfer theoretical learning from the classroom into real-world set-ups, demonstrating higher engagement and practical understanding (Prince & Felder, 2006).

Observational learning, peer interaction, and mentorship in acquiring marketing skills are supported by the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which states that collaborative projects such as community-based business initiatives help students learn not only from instructors, but also from peers and industry practitioners. Business-related experiential learning activities help students retain information effectively and gain confidence in their marketing skills (Liguori et al., 2018). Students' appreciation of learning opportunities and the application of theoretical concepts in real-world settings motivates them through structured peer discussions and guided reflections.

Marketing education has also been transformed by the rise of digital platforms. Integrating digital marketing tools like e-commerce platforms and social media strategies enhances students' experiential and entrepreneurial competencies (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Companies nowadays are reliant on online promotional strategies, which highlights the need for digital literacy in business education (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Learning that incorporates digital tools helps students improve their entrepreneurial intentions and abilities, while also adapting them to modern business environments (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

In the Philippines, bridging academic theories with practical applications has become vital to enhance the employability and entrepreneurial capacities of students. The Commission on Higher Education has emphasized industrial-academic collaboration, highlighting that real-world applications—such as entrepreneurial simulations and market-day activities—are key components in aligning business education with the nation’s development agenda. The business and marketing education landscape in the Philippines is increasingly integrating experiential learning to prepare students to work in the ASEAN Economic Community, underscoring the importance of contextual research in this area (CHED, 2017; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2019).

Activity Participation and Activity Appreciation

Active learning approaches can foster knowledge retention. Morgan and McCade (2012) noted the importance of student engagement and activity participation. To encourage students further, educators must create an environment that will motivate them to become more active in their education (Bucic & Robinson, 2016). Participation and appreciation improve learning outcomes if students feel invested and have a sense of ownership of their activities (Morgan & McCabe, 2012). Market Day activities, such as student group projects, may foster psychological ownership, enhance enjoyment and engagement, and produce an enhanced educational experience (Eden et al., 2024).

Hands-on learning activities impact students' overall motivation and enjoyment, which can lead to student satisfaction (Dernova, 2015). Providing students with such opportunities to apply marketing concepts helps instructors to cultivate a sense of pride and dedication among students in their learning process, boosting their participation and academic results.

Appreciation and Learning Effectiveness

Knowledge retention and enhanced comprehension are important to students' learning activities (Xu et al., 2023). Finding ways to practically apply the information taught can be challenging for students, which may make it difficult for them to appreciate it. Engaging but clear objectives anchored in real-world set-ups provide students with experience that anchors their professional growth, even if this may be challenging for educators (Öncü & Bichelmeyer, 2021; Sun & Wang, 2019).

Participation and Learning Effectiveness

The degree of student engagement in learning activities is correlated with the effectiveness of the learning process (Zhiyong, 2023). Research has indicated that active involvement, collaborative learning, and problem-solving are essential elements in cultivating the abilities required for success in the 21st century, including critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork (Ocon, 2012).

Experiential learning methodologies, such as the Market Day Activity, promote active involvement and engagement, enhancing learning outcomes (Samad et al., 2021). Research indicates that allowing students to use marketing principles in real-world contexts may improve their comprehension, retention, and capacity to apply knowledge in novel scenarios (Luthfiandana et al., 2024).

Moreover, studies on the assurance of learning in marketing education have emphasized the significance of course-embedded evaluation tools in monitoring student learning and guiding ongoing enhancement initiatives. Research on assurance of learning in marketing education has highlighted the importance of course-embedded assessment devices in tracking student learning and informing continuous improvement efforts (Siddiqui, 2021).

Educators should adapt novel learning approaches that are goal-oriented and clear, which will help students fully engage in learning experiences (Mehmood et al., 2021). Active and progressive students are more responsible for their own learning (Mehmood et al., 2021).

The Mediating Role of Activity Appreciation

Activity appreciation refers to an individual's positive perception and valuation of an experience, influencing engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In educational and business contexts, appreciation of an activity significantly impacts how learners interact with its

content, engage with tasks, and apply knowledge in practical settings (Fredricks et al., 2004). Studies have suggested that when learners appreciate an activity, they are more likely to invest effort, leading to deeper learning (Boud et al., 1993). For example, business students who value hands-on activities, such as marketing simulations or entrepreneurship projects, exhibit more vigorous skill development and increased motivation (Kember et al., 2008). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) explains that activity appreciation enhances intrinsic motivation, driving engagement and persistence. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), activities that induce a "flow" state—where challenge meets skill—lead to higher appreciation and enjoyment, resulting in better learning retention. Similarly, Vallerand's (1997) hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggests that individuals who value an activity are more likely to exhibit sustained participation and performance.

Research has highlighted that appreciation mediates the relationship between instructional methods and learning effectiveness. For instance, a study by Wang and Eccles (2013) found that students' enjoyment and perceived value of academic tasks predicted their academic achievement. In business training and marketing education, appreciation of digital marketing simulations, case competitions, and project-based learning fosters entrepreneurial intentions and the application of practical knowledge (Neck & Greene, 2011). Research suggests that the relationship between student participation and learning outcomes is not always direct, and that mediating factors can play a significant role (Lathifah et al., 2024). For instance, the value students assign to a task, or their perceived competence can influence their motivation and engagement, which in turn affects their academic performance (Xu et al., 2023). In professional settings, activity appreciation plays a crucial mediating role between employee engagement and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Employees who valued training programs have demonstrated excellent knowledge retention and skill application, enhancing their workplace productivity (Tims, 2013).

In the Market Day Activity context, student appreciation for the activity may serve as a mediator, influencing the extent to which their participation translates into improved learning effectiveness. This mediating effect underscores the importance of creating learning experiences that are not only engaging, but also perceived as valuable and relevant by students, bridging the gap between theory and practice (Henke et al., 1988). Integration of active learning tasks is much appreciated, as is how students perceive the impact of active strategies on their learning (Shaaruddin & Mohamad, 2017).

Thus, it was posited that student appreciation of this activity mediates the relationship between participation and learning effectiveness. Based on the context above, the following were proposed:

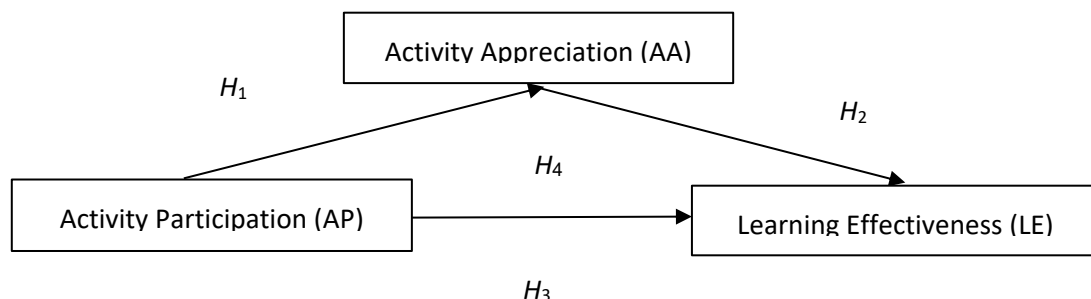
H_1 : Activity Participation is likely to positively affect Activity Appreciation.

H_2 : Activity Appreciation is likely to positively affect Learning Effectiveness.

H_3 : Activity Participation is likely to positively affect Learning Effectiveness.

H_4 : Activity Appreciation mediates the relationship between Activity Participation and Learning Effectiveness.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Methodology

A mediation analysis approach was employed in this study to investigate the interrelationships between student activity appreciation, participation, and learning effectiveness within the context of the BSBA-Marketing Management Program's Market Day Activity. Mediation analysis is a statistical

technique used to identify and evaluate mechanisms or processes that underlie an observed relationship between an independent and a dependent variable (Santos, 2020). According to Baron and Kenny, a variable functions as a mediator when it meets certain conditions (Black et al., 2014).

A researcher-developed questionnaire was administered to 252 students enrolled in the program during the 2nd Semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. An *F*-test power analysis indicated that the minimum sample size to yield a statistical power of 95 percent with an alpha of .05 and an effect size of ($d=.30$) was 252. These 252 students were selected using simple random sampling; those students who did not participate in the Market Day Activity were excluded.

The survey instrument consisted of three sections: Activity Appreciation, Activity Participation, and Learning Effectiveness, with five items for each variable measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The internal consistency of each construct was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with scores as follows: Activity Appreciation (.805), Activity Participation (.792), and Learning Effectiveness (.795). All items met the recommended threshold of $\geq .70$, indicating that they were reliable and valid. SmartPLS 4.1.0.8 was used in the data analysis.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and relationships for the variables Activity Appreciation (AA), Activity Participation (AP), and Learning Effectiveness (LE). The average scores for all three variables were elevated, with AA at 4.437, AP at 4.456, and LE at 4.433. The standard deviations for the variables spanned from .879 to .946, signifying very uniform responses among participants. The kurtosis results (AA=3.062, AP=3.041, LE=3.081) were approximately normal, signifying that the distributions were very close to normal. All three variables demonstrated negative skewness (AA = -2.368, AP = -2.347, LE = -2.316), indicating that participants predominantly assigned favorable ratings, with scores concentrated at the upper end of the scale.

Activity Appreciation (AA) exhibited a positive connection with Activity Participation (AP) ($r = .676$) and Learning Effectiveness (LE) ($r = .635$). Likewise, Activity Participation (AP) exhibited a positive correlation with Learning Effectiveness (LE) ($r = .505$). The positive correlations indicated that individuals who reported increased involvement also showed a greater appreciation for the activity and perceived it as more effective in terms of learning. Similarly, increased participation was correlated with an enhanced assessment of learning effectiveness.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness, and Correlations among the Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skew	Correlations		
					AA	AP	LE
Activity Appreciation (AA)	4.437	.944	3.062	-2.368	1.000		
Activity Participation (AP)	4.456	.879	3.041	-2.347	.676	1.000	
Learning Effectiveness (LE)	4.433	.946	3.081	-2.316	.635	.505	1.000

Measurement Model

This phase of evaluation aimed to establish the measurement model, ultimately ensuring the reliability and validity of the study (Hair, 2006). There were 15 items included in this process, and none of them were disregarded as their scores were all above .600, and factor loadings lower than this should be removed (Hair et al., 2017). Thus, all items were included in the analysis of the data. The composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs were equivalent to or greater than .50 and .70, respectively (Table 2). As a result, convergent validity and dependability were confirmed. Moreover, Table 3 displays the discriminant validity outcomes obtained from Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT).

Table 2 *Item Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVEs*

Variable	Item Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha (a)	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVEs)
Activity Appreciation		.806	.811	.866	.566
AA1	.637				
AA2	.795				
AA3	.756				
AA4	.780				
AA5	.783				
Activity Participation		.792	.795	.857	.547
AP1	.754				
AP2	.792				
AP3	.686				
AP4	.715				
AP5	.746				
Learning Effectiveness		.795	.803	.859	.552
LE1	.652				
LE2	.824				
LE3	.742				
LE4	.745				
LE5	.741				

Table 3 *Discriminant Validity of the Variables: Fornier-Larcker Criterion and HTMT*

Variable	AA	AP	LE
Activity Appreciation (AA)	.752	.846	.789
Activity Participation (AP)	.676	.739	.630
Learning Effectiveness (LE)	.635	.505	.743

Model Fit Assessment

The model fit indicators reported in this study suggested an acceptable level of model fit, as shown in Table 4. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value of .066 was below the recommended threshold of .08 (Roemer et al., 2021), indicating a good fit between the observed and predicted correlations. Additionally, the unweighted least squares discrepancy (d_ULS) and geodesic discrepancy (d_G) values of .526 and .139, respectively, also fell within the recommended ranges, further supporting the model's goodness of fit.

Table 4 *Model Fit Summary*

	Value	Criteria	Remarks
SRMR	.066	Acceptable if $\leq .08$	Acceptable
d_ULS	.526	Acceptable if $\leq .95$	Acceptable
d_G	.139	Acceptable if $\leq .95$	Acceptable
Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	1.840	Acceptable if ≤ 5.00 ; Ideally if ≤ 3.30	Ideal
Tolerance	.543	Acceptable if $\geq .20$	Acceptable

Note: Model fit was assessed using (SRMR), d_ULS, and d_G criteria (Roemer et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2021). Multicollinearity was evaluated using VIF and tolerance levels in accordance with Salmerón et al. (2020).

The variance inflation factor (VIF) value of 1.840 and the tolerance value of .543 suggested that multicollinearity was not a concern in the model. The VIF value was well below the commonly used cut-off of 5.00, and the tolerance value was above the recommended threshold of .10 (Salmerón et al., 2020), indicating that the independent variables in the model were not highly correlated with each other. This provided confidence in the stability and reliability of the parameter estimates in the structural model.

Structural Model Assessment

The coefficient (R^2) results showed values of .457 and .414 for activity participation and activity appreciation, respectively, thus supporting the model's sample predictive capability (Sarstedt et al., 2017) as they exceeded the required level of .10 (Falk & Miller, 1992). Moreover, effect sizes were calculated to determine the independent variable's contribution to the dependent variable's R-squared value. In this study, activity participation was found to predict both learning effectiveness and activity appreciation. The relative effect sizes (f^2) of the exogenous variable were determined, revealing that it had a significant effect on the endogenous variable ($> .35$) (Cohen, 1988), except for participation and learning effectiveness.

In such comparisons, model measurement evaluation is required; structural model measurement is done in separate phases. Hypotheses were tested in a series of steps. Step one, participation, had an immediate impact on appreciation and learning effectiveness. Then, the direct impact of appreciation on learning effectiveness was demonstrated. To study the significance of direct paths and estimate standard errors, a bootstrap resampling technique was used using 5,000 resamples. Table 4 illustrates the evaluation outcomes of observations anticipated for direct relationships. Finally, the mediation results suggested that activity appreciation had an impact on learning effectiveness.

Table 5 confirms the significant influence of participation on appreciation ($\beta = .676$, $t = 11.652$, $p = < .000$) and appreciation on learning effectiveness ($\beta = .542$, $t = 7.749$, $p = < .000$). As a result, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Moreover, participation also had a significant direct and positive influence on learning effectiveness ($\beta = .138$, $t = .080$, $p = < .042$), hence supporting Hypothesis 3.

Table 5 Structural Model Path Coefficient (Direct Relationship)

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	SD	t-value	Decision
H_1	AP->AA	.676	.058	11.652*	Supported
H_2	AA->LE	.542	.070	7.749*	Supported
H_3	AP->LE	.138	.080	1.731*	Supported
	R^2			f^2	
AP	$R^2 = .457$		AP->AA	$f^2 = .842$	
AA	$R^2 = .414$		AA->LE	$f^2 = .272$	
			AP->LE	$f^2 = .018$	

Note: Significance of direct relationships was assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Model fit was evaluated using R^2 , f^2 , and t -statistics as recommended by Falk & Miller (1992), Cohen (1988), and Sarstedt et al. (2017), aligning with PLS-SEM guidelines Hair et al., (2019). Activity Participation (AP), Activity Appreciation (AA), and Learning Effectiveness (LE), * $p < .01$

Mediation Analysis

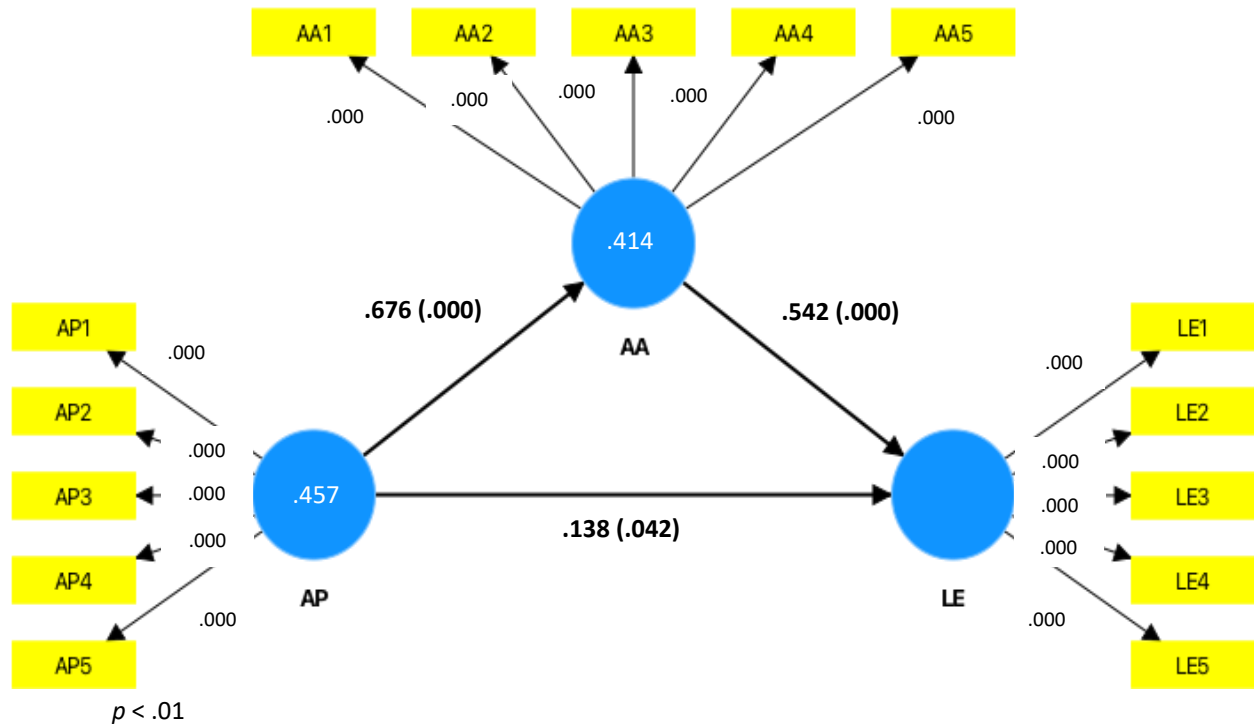
H_4 evaluated whether activity appreciation mediated the association between activity participation and learning effectiveness. The results indicated that the incorporation of the mediator into the model had a positive and significant direct effect ($\beta = .138$, $t = 1.731$, $p < .000$); however, the indirect effect was also significant when the mediator was considered ($\beta = .366$, $t = 6.018$, $p < .000$). The results thus pointed to partial mediation. This suggests that activity appreciation acts as a partial mediating factor between activity participation and learning effectiveness. H_4 was therefore approved. Table 6 presents the mediation analysis results, while Figure 2 shows the results.

Table 6 Mediation Result

Total Effects (AP->LE)		Direct Effect (AP->LE)		Indirect Effects of AP on LE				
Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value		Coefficient	SD	t-value	p-value
.505	.000	.138	.000	H ₄ : AP->AA->LE	.366	.061	6.018	.000

$p < .01$

Figure 2 Structural Equation Model



Discussion

The results of this study provide insights into the interrelationships between students' activity participation, appreciation, and learning effectiveness within the context of the BSBA-Marketing Management Program's Market Day Activity. The findings supported the proposed hypotheses, noting the importance of activity participation and appreciation in enhancing students' learning effectiveness. The positive and strong connection between activity participation and activity appreciation (H_1) is aligned with prior research, which has indicated that students' active involvement in course-related tasks is important in inculcating an attitude of appreciation and enhancing learning achievements (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Gamson, 1987). This means that students who took an active role during the Market Day Activity appreciated the significance of this experiential learning.

The positive correlation between activity appreciation and learning effectiveness (H_2) corroborates the studies of Kuh (2009) and Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005), which found that when students recognize the value of activities, it positively affects overall learning outcomes. This means that designing and implementing engaging activities can contribute to overall learning absorption.

The direct and positive connection between activity participation and learning effectiveness (H_3) emphasizes the importance of active participation in enhancing students' learning. Students' involvement in educational activities serves as a predictor of academic achievement and learning outcomes (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2009).

The partial mediation of appreciation on the relationship between activity participation and learning effectiveness (H_4) implies that students' direct participation in Market Day Activity enriched learning effectiveness. This affected students' appreciation and recognition of the value of the activity,

meaning that it is important to create positive and meaningful learning experiences that are student-based, which can enhance their active engagement.

In addition, these findings were consistent with similar studies conducted in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian contexts. For instance, Amoguis (2014) highlighted that business schools and industries view a business simulation laboratory as a suitable surrogate for real-world experience. Prerequisite skills in business enterprise simulation, which students have not yet fully mastered, may impact their ability to manage and run their future businesses (Pespeñan et al., 2023).

Similarly, research by Soomro et al., (2021) in Thailand revealed students' strong intrinsic motivation to pursue career-oriented goals and actively engage in entrepreneurial behavior. Their commitment to completing assigned tasks, combined with the structured opportunities provided by entrepreneurship programs, likely fosters a heightened sense of self-efficacy and control over their business ideas. This suggests that the academic environment, particularly when enriched with experiential components, plays a critical role in shaping students' entrepreneurial mindsets and behavior. These local and regional studies support the relevance and applicability of experiential and participatory learning strategies in enhancing cognitive and affective outcomes in higher education. By aligning the results of this study with findings from similar country contexts, the content validity of the current research is further strengthened.

The Psychological Mechanism of Activity Appreciation

An individual's perception of the value of their work is strengthened by activity appreciation, which acts as a psychological reinforcement mechanism that promotes engagement. The Job Demands-Resources Model of Bakker and Demerouti (2007) suggested that burnout can be reduced by personal and job resources that drive motivation. While appreciation may be viewed as a cognitive and emotional resource, students' purpose and commitment to a task can be reinforced. Those who appreciate their work tend to make an emotional connection that can create a cycle of engaging and sustained effort, reinforcing their motivation.

A study by Bandura (1997) concluded that when individuals value an activity, they see themselves as more competent, which could lead to increased perseverance and improved performance. This highlights how appreciation influences motivation and strengthens self-belief, allowing individuals to perform more effectively.

Long-Term Engagement and Retention

Beyond immediate task performance, activity appreciation plays a significant role in long-term engagement. Employees who develop a sense of purpose and appreciation for their work are likelier to exhibit higher job satisfaction, lower turnover rates, and greater well-being (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This suggests that fostering a culture of appreciation within organizations can enhance workplace commitment and productivity.

Similarly, in educational settings, students who find their coursework meaningful and valuable demonstrate higher cognitive engagement and persistence (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). By incorporating practical, real-world applications, educators can enhance students' appreciation of learning, leading to improved academic performance and retention.

Practical Strategies for Enhancing Activity Appreciation

Given its impact on motivation and performance, organizations and educators should implement strategic interventions to cultivate appreciation as follows:

1. **Personalization and Job Crafting**—Allowing employees and students to adapt tasks to align with their strengths and interests can increase appreciation and motivation. Organizations that promote job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) empower individuals to shape their roles to enhance engagement and commitment.
2. **Recognition and Meaning-Making**—Leaders and educators should integrate recognition programs, storytelling, and purpose-driven communication to reinforce the significance of

tasks. Acknowledging individual contributions and connecting work to a broader impact can increase appreciation and intrinsic motivation.

3. Gamification and Engagement Design—In both educational and professional settings, leveraging gamification strategies (e.g. rewards, progress tracking, and competitive elements) can make tasks more engaging and fulfilling (Deterding et al., 2011).

Conclusion and Implications

This study highlighted the role of activity participation as mediated by appreciation of learning effectiveness. Results showed that active engagement on Market Day Activity significantly enhanced students' perceived value of their learning processes and positively influenced their academic performance. The relationships among the variables emphasized the necessity of well-structured experiential learning methods designed to provide students with meaningful engagement.

The partial mediation results of activity appreciation showed that direct participation contributes to learning effectiveness. The value and importance of the Market Day Activity served as a significant step in the learning process. This was anchored within an educational framework that emphasizes student engagement, genuine motivation, and experiential learning, thereby facilitating academic success and knowledge retention.

This implies that educators, curriculum creators, and institutional policymakers provision of integrative and application-driven learning experiences can encourage students and cultivate an increased appreciation of academic activities.

Notably, creating an environment that promotes participation and learning experiences that enhance professional growth among students is very important. By designing structured, curriculum-based learning experiences, educational institutions can promote student engagement, learning motivation, and overall learning absorption.

It is recommended that educators increase student involvement in experiential activities, such as Market Day, by allowing them to participate in the planning, execution, and decision-making related to these events. Activities should be designed to be meaningful, engaging, and relevant to students' future careers, thereby enhancing their appreciation and learning. Incorporating reflection sessions, mentorship, and real-world applications can help students value these experiences more, which in turn strengthens the impact of participation on their learning. Creating a supportive and engaging environment ensures that students not only participate actively but also gain lasting knowledge and skills.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The research was conducted within one program, and so its results may not be applicable to other programs. Follow-up research on the relationships analyzed in this study across various academic programs or institutions would improve the generalizability of the results. This study also employed self-reported metrics of activity participation, activity appreciation, and learning effectiveness, which may be prone to biases. Future research may integrate objective assessments of learning outcomes to validate the results. The cross-sectional nature of the data restricted the capacity to establish causal inferences.

Acknowledgement

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Spiritual Identity Formation of Non-Adventist Individuals in a Faith-based Higher Education Institution in Thailand

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study aimed to explore the influence of religion on the identity formation of individuals, particularly within the context of higher education. Specifically, it sought to investigate how religious beliefs influence one's pursuit of meaning, purpose, and a unified sense of self. As identity development is a critical task during young adulthood, particularly among university students, the study examined how spiritual transformation and faith-based affiliation play an integral role in shaping individual identity.

Introduction/Background: Identity formation is a developmental process through which individuals come to understand who they are in relation to the world around them. It encompasses multiple dimensions, including personal values, social roles, and future aspirations. Religion, as a powerful socio-cultural and personal force, has been widely acknowledged in scholarly literature as a significant factor in this process. Religious belief systems provide moral frameworks, community support, and existential meaning, which can guide individuals through periods of uncertainty and self-exploration. In faith-based educational institutions, students are often immersed in an environment that actively promotes spiritual development alongside academic learning. Such settings provide opportunities for students to explore religious teachings, participate in faith-based activities, and form relationships with others who model religious commitment. These influences may contribute to the shaping of both spiritual and non-spiritual dimensions of identity. However, research on the specific mechanisms through which religion influences identity formation remains limited, particularly in non-Western contexts. This study addresses that gap by examining how exposure to religious beliefs and practices within an educational setting contributes to the development of identity.

Methodology: This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design, using purposive sampling to select participants who had undergone a religious transformation during their time in a faith-based academic environment. Three individuals who had previously identified as spiritual seekers and later committed to a specific faith tradition were invited to participate in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The guiding questions focused on participants' pre-conversion experiences, the process of learning about the religion, their decision to join the faith community through baptism, and how their identities had changed since their religious commitment. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically. The data were coded to identify recurring patterns and categorized into three key stages: pre-conversion searching, religious engagement and transformation, and post-conversion identity integration. This framework was used to trace the progression of spiritual influence on the participants' self-concepts and personal development.

Findings: Participants described their initial state as one of inner conflict, characterized by a profound yearning for peace, healing, and clarity of life direction. They reported feeling spiritually disconnected and searching for answers that they believed could not be found through secular means. This phase was marked by emotional vulnerability and openness to new perspectives. The second stage of the journey began when participants encountered individuals within the religious community whose lives and values made a lasting impression. Through these interpersonal connections, they were introduced

to religious teachings, community activities, and structured spiritual practices. As participants engaged more deeply with religious texts and communal worship, they reported growing clarity, emotional stability, and a sense of belonging. This phase culminated in their decision to undergo baptism, symbolizing a formal commitment to the faith. In the post-conversion stage, participants experienced a reorientation of their identity across multiple dimensions. Spiritually, they described a deeper relationship with a higher power and increased commitment to religious practices. Mentally, they noted greater peace of mind, moral clarity, and purpose. Socially, they developed stronger, values-aligned relationships. Physically, some participants reported lifestyle changes inspired by religious teachings on health and wellness. These transformations were described as rapid and noticeable, occurring within a relatively short period after conversion.

Contribution/Impact on Society: The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted role of religion in identity formation. Religious involvement not only shapes spiritual beliefs, but also influences mental health, social relationships, and behavioral patterns. In a broader societal context, this highlights the potential of faith-based communities and institutions to promote holistic personal development, particularly among young adults navigating transitional life stages. The study also brings attention to the role of lived experiences—such as interpersonal relationships and community engagement—in encouraging religious exploration and identity consolidation.

Recommendations: Given the powerful role that religion can play in identity formation, educators and leaders within faith-based institutions should intentionally cultivate environments that encourage open dialogue, reflection, and authentic spiritual experiences. Mentorship programs, religious study groups, and values-driven campus life initiatives can serve as effective platforms for supporting students' identity development. Moreover, curriculum designers should consider integrating discussions on spirituality, ethics, and personal growth into academic programs to promote well-rounded development.

Research Limitations: One limitation of this study was its small sample size, consisting of only three participants, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused on a single religious tradition and took place within a particular type of educational institution, which may not reflect the experiences of individuals in other contexts or faiths. Social desirability bias may also have influenced participants' responses, given the spiritual nature of the subject.

Future Research: Future studies could expand this research by including a more diverse participant pool across different faith-based affiliations and institutional settings. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into how religious identity evolves over time. Comparative studies between faith-based and secular institutions may further illuminate the distinct ways that environments shape identity development. Integrating quantitative measures alongside qualitative narratives could also enhance the robustness of findings.

Keywords: *Identity formation, non-Adventist individual, spiritual identity, faith-based institution*

Introduction

Identity formation is a core developmental process, particularly during adolescence and transitional periods. Crocetti (2017) has emphasized that individuals must establish a clear and stable sense of self, especially when encountering new experiences that challenge their existing beliefs and values. This process is even more complex within faith-based institutions of higher education, where institutional values and religious teachings shape students' personal and social identities.

Religion significantly influences identity formation by providing a framework for moral values and behavioral norms (Dillon, 2003). It serves as a guiding force in individuals' lives, shaping their sense of belonging and personal meaning. King (2003) noted that religion provides a transcendent worldview that helps individuals make sense of their experiences, guiding their personal and social interactions.

In the context of Seventh-day Adventist institutions, religious beliefs and values are deeply embedded in educational structures and social environments. The Adventist Church, which emphasizes Bible-based education, aims to instill Christian principles in students' character development (Rieger, 2023). These institutions focus on holistic education—spiritually, mentally, and physically—believing that personal well-being enhances spiritual growth (The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2023). However, non-Adventist students studying in these institutions encounter unique challenges in navigating their identities within a predominantly Adventist culture.

Review of Literature

Understanding how spiritual identity is formed is a complex and ongoing process that draws from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, theology, and education. Religious identity involves more than formal affiliation or ritual participation, it includes deeply held beliefs, personal values, social belonging, and an understanding of one's place in the world. In educational environments with a strong religious foundation, such as Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) institutions, identity formation becomes particularly pronounced since religious values are embedded into daily practices, institutional culture, and academic instruction. For non-Adventist students, engaging with a dominant faith tradition can present both opportunities for growth and challenges to their sense of belonging, belief, and adaptation.

Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development emphasized that spiritual identity evolves through developmental stages, shaped by life experiences and meaning making. Parks (2000) similarly highlighted that in young adulthood, especially within higher education; students seek coherence, purpose, and spiritual mentors. King and Boyatzis (2004) affirmed that spiritual development during adolescence and emerging adulthood involves the dynamic interplay of internal reflection and social environments. However, this journey is not always smooth. Cohen et al. (2005) contended that spiritual transformation can involve emotional struggles, dissonance, and discomfort, which are integral to authentic growth. Sremac and Ganzevoort (2013) emphasized that spiritual transformation often emerges from personal crises or trauma, serving as a foundation for renewed identity and meaning making. Together, these perspectives underscore that spiritual identity is shaped through both nurture and disruption, calling for supportive, reflective environments, particularly within faith-based institutions.

The Role of Institutions

Schools and universities have a major influence on how students grow and think about who they are. Christian colleges, for example, are sometimes called "moral communities" where values and beliefs are part of everyday life (Davignon & Thomson, 2015). This kind of environment affects students in many ways—through chapel services, classroom discussions, school rules, and how the school expects students to behave.

At SDA schools, Adventist beliefs are integrated into the curriculum and the way people are expected to live. This kind of setting can help Adventist students feel supported in their faith. But for students who are not Adventist, this experience can be mixed. On the one hand, they might find new ideas that help them grow. On the other hand, they might feel as though they don't completely belong, or are being pressured to change their beliefs.

Tolman et al. (2021) explained that teachers and staff in faith-based schools play an important role. They don't just teach; they also act as role models. This means that students may look up to them not only for knowledge, but also for how they live their faith. For non-Adventist students, this can feel like quiet pressure to conform to the same beliefs, which can affect how freely they can be themselves.

Being in the Minority

For non-Adventist students, going to an Adventist school means being part of a smaller group with different beliefs. This can be both helpful and difficult. Some students enjoy learning about Adventist

ideas and may grow in their own spiritual lives. Some may even choose to become Adventists. But others might feel left out, especially if most events and conversations focus exclusively on Adventist beliefs (Fan et al., 2021).

Thomson and Davignon (2017) found that when there is more religious and political variety among students, it can help students understand other people better. But this can also make some feel different or even uncomfortable, especially if their views aren't welcomed or talked about.

Friends are a big part of school life. It can be hard for students from different religious backgrounds to find close friends when many social activities are centered around faith—like prayer groups, worship services, or church-related trips (Uecker, 2008). This can make some students feel left out and affect their perception of their place in the school.

Teachers and the Curriculum

In faith-based schools, teachers often have more than one role. They teach their subjects, but they also share the school's values and faith with their students. Cohen-Malayev et al. (2014) found that teachers can help students find meaning in religion by the way they act and what they say in class.

In SDA schools, religious ideas are sometimes incorporated into subjects such as science, history, or literature. When students disagree with what is being taught, they may stop paying attention or feel disconnected (Barnes et al., 2017). They might not speak up in class if they feel their views will not be accepted or respected.

Influence of the Family

Even though schools have a big impact, the family still plays a major role in shaping religious beliefs. D'Angelo et al. (2023) showed that when parents trust a faith-based school, it can help students to grow both spiritually and academically. This means students from religious homes, whether they are Adventist or not, may find some parts of faith-based school life familiar or helpful.

Gemar (2023) pointed out that children often follow the religion of their parents. But when they go to school, they may start to question or compare their own beliefs to those they hear in the classroom or in chapel. Some hold firmly to their family's beliefs, while others may feel unsure or confused.

Emotional and Personal Experiences

Building a religious identity is not just a social process; it also affects how students feel inside. Niens et al. (2012) found that when students feel like they don't fit in or are left out because of their beliefs, this can lead to stress or worry. This is especially true during the college years, which are already a time of change and growth.

Vignoles (2017) described identity development as a process that includes asking questions, going through struggles, and eventually making decisions about who you are. Para (2008) supported this idea, saying that sometimes young people must go through hard times before they really know what they believe.

de Bruin-Wassinkmaat et al. (2021) noted that students from very religious backgrounds may feel even more tension if they find themselves in an environment where people hold different beliefs. This can either strengthen their beliefs or leave them feeling uncertain and unsure about their faith.

Culture and Society

Religious identity is also shaped by what's going on in the wider culture. Komakhidze and Fatemi (2021) studied Yezidi women in Eastern Europe and found that their religious beliefs were affected by changes in politics and society. In the same way, students in Adventist schools are not only shaped by their schools, but also by their own backgrounds, home countries, and the way religion is seen in their communities.

Amini and Nguyen (2021) found that Muslim and Jewish students in the U.S. often had to balance their religious beliefs with their desire to fit into American society. This is like what non-Adventist

students go through when they try to stay true to their beliefs while studying in a school where most people are Adventist.

School Goals and Student Growth

Even with these challenges, Adventist schools try to help students grow in all areas—mentally, physically, and spiritually. Emiroğlu (2020) stated that religious identity is shaped by both personal experience and the group to which one belongs. Adventist schools aim to instill values such as service, healthy living, and virtuous character traits (Kitjaroonchai & Hungyo, 2017). These values can be helpful for all students, not just Adventists.

The SDA Church (2023) states that its schools aim to prepare students to live with purpose and to be helpful to others. While these goals work well for students who are already Adventist, students from other religions may feel unsure about how they fit into this picture. Still, some may find the focus on values and character meaningful and decide to grow in their own ways.

To sum it up, the religious identity of non-Adventist students in Adventist schools is shaped by various factors, including school rules, teachers, friends, family, emotions, and the world around them. Some students may feel that school helps them grow, while others may feel unsure or left out. More research is needed to understand their experiences better, and to find ways for schools to support all students regardless of their faith.

This study was guided by two key frameworks: (a) Marcia's (1966, 1980) Theory of Identity Status, and (b) Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory. Marcia conceptualized identity development as a dynamic process involving exploration and commitment, a perspective particularly useful for understanding how students negotiate and redefine their religious identities in a faith-based educational setting. Complementing this, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes that identity formation occurs within nested systems of influence—ranging from immediate contexts such as peers, teachers, and family to broader institutional and cultural structures.

Together, these theories help explain how non-Adventist students experience and interpret spiritual transformation as they interact with the religious environment at an Adventist university. They also provide a foundation for analyzing how internal meaning-making and external influences shape identity development.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore the identity formation experiences of non-Adventist students in a Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher education. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the key factors that shape non-Adventist students' religious and personal identities.
2. Examine the challenges and opportunities that these students encountered during their identity formation process.
3. Analyze the role of institutional culture and environment in influencing their spiritual and personal development.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative phenomenological research approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews and thematic coding to explore the identity formation experiences of individuals before, during, and after their baptism into the Adventist denomination. We aimed to understand the personal transformation process influenced by the institutional environment at an Adventist international university, and how participants integrated Adventist beliefs into their identities.

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who met the following criteria: they had to be baptized members of the Adventist denomination, their decision to be baptized had to be influenced by an Adventist international university, and they were willing to participate in interviews and share their experiences. Three participants were selected, each having come from a different religious background prior to their baptism. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants.

Table 1 *Overview of Participants*

Participant	Prior Religious Background	Current Status	Baptism Year
P1	Christian, non-religious	AIU Master's student, AIU Bachelor's graduate	2023
P2	Buddhist	AIU senior undergraduate student	2022
P3	Born to Adventist parents	Member of AIU University Chorale	2023

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to freely express their experiences. The interview questions focused on three key phases of identity formation: before baptism, during the conversion process, and after baptism. The "before" section explored participants' religious backgrounds, beliefs, and values prior to their exposure to Adventism. The "during" section examined the factors at an Adventist international university that influenced their decision to be baptized, including religious teachings, social interactions, and institutional culture. Finally, the "after" section investigated how baptism impacted their identity, religious commitment, and social integration within the Adventist community. Participants were asked nine main questions, with additional follow-up questions tailored to their responses for a deeper understanding of their identity formation.

For data analysis, responses were categorized into three chronological themes: before baptism, during the conversion process, and after baptism. This thematic coding approach enabled a structured analysis of participants' transformation, allowing for a clearer understanding of how their beliefs and identities evolved over time. By organizing data chronologically rather than thematically, the study ensured that participants' religious journeys were analyzed as continuous experiences, rather than as isolated events.

This methodological approach provided valuable insights into how non-Adventist individuals have navigated the transformation of their religious identity in a faith-based higher education setting.

Findings

The findings illustrate the transformative journey of participants, highlighting key themes such as personal search for meaning, the influence of religious environment, emotional and psychological impact, social reinforcement, and long-term changes in behavior and decision-making.

1. Stages of Religious Identity Transformation

Participants experienced religious identity transformation through various stages, moving from initial curiosity to full integration of Adventist beliefs; these stages are shown below in Table 2. Their journeys were characterized by exposure to new religious perspectives, active engagement in spiritual activities, and eventual internalization of faith-based values.

Table 2 *Identity Transformation Stages*

Identity Stage	Key Characteristics
Pre-Adventist	Uncertainty, search for purpose, limited religious involvement, exposure to secular influences
Transitional	Exposure to Adventist teachings, questioning of previous beliefs, increased engagement in religious discussions, attendance at spiritual gatherings
Post-Adventist	Stronger faith commitment, inner peace, deeper integration of religious values into daily life, increased participation in community and faith-based activities

2. Psychological and Social Impact of Religious Identity Transformation

Participants reported profound psychological and social changes throughout their transformation. One participant described some initial skepticism, stating: *"I grew up in a non-religious household where faith was never discussed. When I first arrived at the Adventist international university, I felt out of place among religious peers. However, as I attended Bible studies and engaged in discussions, I*

started to reconsider my views." This aligns with studies on religious identity formation, which suggest that exposure to structured faith-based communities can prompt cognitive and emotional exploration (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Another participant shared being rocked by emotional turmoil before transformation ensued: *"I had a lot of unresolved anxiety and lacked direction. Seeing how my Adventist friends carried themselves with purpose made me curious. I initially resisted, but over time, I found peace in learning about the faith."* This demonstrated how social environments may act as catalysts for religious engagement and identity development (King & Furrow, 2004).

Participants also reported significant improvements in their interpersonal relationships. One individual expressed: *"Before I accepted Adventist beliefs, I was socially disconnected. But once I embraced the faith, I became part of a supportive community that shared my values and encouraged me."* This corresponds with research indicating that religious communities provide strong social support networks, fostering emotional resilience and belonging (Dillon, 2003).

3. Behavioral and Lifestyle Changes

As participants transitioned into their new religious identity, their behaviors and daily routines changed significantly. These transformations were reflected in lifestyle choices, moral reasoning, and career aspirations; details are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3 *Changes in Daily Life Before and After Adventist Influence*

Aspect	Pre-Adventist	Post-Adventist
Daily Routine	Irregular schedule, lack of structure	Regular prayer, Bible study, community engagement
Social Interactions	Limited, superficial friendships	Meaningful relationships, mentorship, and community involvement
Decision Making	Influenced by personal desires, societal norms	Guided by faith-based values, ethical considerations
Mental Well-being	Anxiety, uncertainty	Inner peace, purpose-driven mindset

One participant reflected on behavioral changes: *"I used to be indifferent about my choices, but now I evaluate them through a moral lens. Faith has given me a sense of responsibility and clarity."* This observation was supported by previous studies which have indicated that religious commitment fosters ethical decision-making and a greater sense of accountability (McAdams & Pals, 2006).

Another participant commented on how faith had influenced personal academic and professional aspirations: *"I initially pursued a career for financial stability, but after my conversion, I realized I wanted to make a meaningful impact. My faith now guides my ambitions."* This demonstrated how religious identity formation extends beyond spiritual beliefs, shaping career choices and life trajectories (Astin et al., 2011).

4. Emotional Stability and Sense of Purpose

All participants reported an enhanced sense of purpose and emotional stability after adopting Adventist beliefs. One participant stated: *"I no longer feel like I'm drifting through life. My faith has given me purpose, and I approach challenges with confidence."* This is aligned with findings by Cucchi and Qoronfleh (2025), who emphasized that religious and spiritual frameworks offer individuals a sense of meaning and emotional resilience, particularly in culturally immersive environments. Similarly, Aggarwal et al. (2023) found that religiosity and spirituality play a protective role in mental health, contributing to reduced anxiety and depression, especially among young people.

Overall, the findings indicated that religious identity transformation was not merely a change in beliefs, but a holistic shift in emotional, social, and behavioral dimensions. This transformation was aligned with existing literature on the role of faith in identity construction and well-being, reinforcing the notion that faith-based environments offer both psychological and social benefits.

Discussion

This study offers significant insights into the dynamics of religious identity formation among non-Adventist students immersed in a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) higher educational context. It contributes to the broader discourse by illustrating how sustained engagement with a faith-based institution may catalyze spiritual, moral, and psychological transformation, particularly in individuals navigating an unfamiliar faith-based environment.

Consistent with existing scholarship (King & Furrow, 2004; Smith & Denton, 2005), the findings confirmed that faith-based institutions function as powerful agents of identity construction, offering both ideological frameworks and relational scaffolding. However, this study extends prior work by emphasizing the distinct influence of an Adventist institutional ethos, particularly its holistic educational philosophy, integration of faith and learning, and moral expectations, on non-Adventist students. The Adventist international context provides structured opportunities for spiritual reflection, identity exploration, and value reorientation. This aligns with White's (1903) foundational assertion that character formation is central to faith-based education and resonates with Rieger's (2023) argument that intentional faith-based environments nurture moral discernment and personal growth.

Notably, participants reported a deepened sense of spiritual awareness, accompanied by emotional and psychological development. Their testimonies of increased inner peace, clarity, and purpose corroborated Smith et al.'s (1999) findings on the psychological benefits of a strong religious identity. King (2003) similarly noted that religious worldviews provide a coherent interpretive lens for making sense of life's challenges, contributing to emotional resilience and social orientation. One participant's remark: *"Before I committed to my faith, I constantly felt lost. Now, I feel anchored in something greater than myself"*—captures how spiritual commitment can anchor one's broader sense of self.

The relational and communal dimensions of religious identity formation also emerged as pivotal. Friendships with Adventist peers, faculty mentorship, and active participation in spiritual programs played a formative role. These findings aligned with Dillon's (2003) assertion that religious communities serve as primary contexts for negotiating and internalizing belief systems. Within such moral communities (Davignon & Thomson, 2015), the social reinforcement of shared values fosters continuity, belonging, and conviction. For non-Adventist students, the experience of being surrounded by a dominant religious culture presented both opportunities for transformation and challenges related to social integration.

Indeed, the dual experience of inclusion and marginalization was salient. While some students described enriching encounters with Adventist values and practices, others reported moments of dissonance, particularly around perceived expectations to conform. This tension reflected findings by Fan et al. (2021), who noted that religious minority students in faith-based institutions often struggle with cultural fit and belonging. Uecker (2008) further highlighted that limited access to religiously similar peer groups may hinder social support and exploration. Despite these tensions, the exposure to differing beliefs appeared to foster religious literacy and interfaith empathy (Edwards, 2024), reinforcing the educational value of pluralistic engagement, even within confessional institutions.

The role of faculty as moral and spiritual exemplars was another key finding. Participants consistently highlighted teachers as influential figures, often shaping their ethical reasoning and spiritual understanding more than familial or peer influences. This supported Cohen-Malayev et al.'s (2014) conclusion that educators in faith-based settings significantly contribute to students' religious socialization. However, for some non-Adventist students, curricular content grounded in biblical worldviews posed challenges to academic engagement, particularly when conflicting with pre-existing beliefs (Barnes et al., 2017). Nevertheless, as Kitjaroonchai and Hungyo (2017) argued, the Adventist educational framework—through its integration of faith, learning, and service—promotes transformative outcomes that transcend doctrinal instruction.

Furthermore, identity transformation extended beyond the spiritual domain into behavioral and vocational realms. Participants described shifts in ethical decision-making, lifestyle choices, and career

aspirations toward service-oriented paths. This finding resonated with McAdams and Pals' (2006) model of narrative identity, which emphasizes the interplay between personal values, life purpose, and identity continuity. One student's reflection: *"I used to make decisions based purely on personal gain, but my faith has taught me the importance of making choices that align with higher values"*, illustrated the long-term behavioral implications of internalized religious identity.

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical periods for identity consolidation, particularly when individuals are exposed to new ideational and cultural frameworks. Crocetti (2017) underscored the developmental necessity of navigating tensions between continuity and change, especially in ideologically charged contexts. Adventist education, with its holistic focus on intellectual, physical, and spiritual development, positions itself to guide this process intentionally (Rieger, 2023; The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2023).

Parental influence, while not a central focus of this study, emerged as an indirect factor. D'Angelo et al. (2023) noted that parental trust in faith-based institutions significantly shapes students' openness to religious formation and perceived academic value. The decision of many non-Adventist parents to enroll their children in faith-based institutions—despite differing personal beliefs—reflects a broader societal recognition of the moral and developmental benefits offered by such settings (Rieger, 2023).

The identity development process described by participants reflected a pattern of active exploration followed by commitment, consistent with the Identity Status model (Iwasa et al., 2023). This process was not without internal conflict. Participants navigated tensions between inherited beliefs and institutional norms, highlighting the emotional complexity of identity negotiation (Para, 2008). In a faith-based academic setting, where personal and communal expectations often converge, the stakes of this negotiation are amplified.

Finally, this study reaffirms the transformative potential of faith-based higher education. Religious identity, as Emiroğlu (2020) emphasizes, is co-constructed through individual agency and communal reinforcement. Adventist institutions—through their emphasis on community service, healthful living, and mission—offer students a framework for meaning-making that transcends doctrinal adherence. The findings suggest that such environments can nurture holistic identity development, equipping students—regardless of faith background—with tools for purposeful living and ethical engagement with the world.

Implications of the Study

This study has several important implications for faith-based institutions, educators, and individuals navigating identity formation. First, the findings suggest that faith-based institutions should continue fostering environments that encourage open dialogue, reflection, and engagement with faith. Structured mentorship programs, discussion forums, and spiritual retreats could further enhance the identity formation process for individuals exploring religious beliefs.

Second, for educators, integrating faith-based learning within academic settings can contribute to holistic student development. The study indicates that a combination of academic rigor and spiritual engagement fosters critical thinking, self-awareness, and ethical decision-making. Universities should consider incorporating interdisciplinary approaches that allow students to explore the intersection of faith, personal identity, and professional aspirations.

Third, the study highlights the significance of social support systems in religious identity formation. Faith-based organizations should emphasize the role of peer mentorship, community activities, and group discussions to facilitate deeper engagement with religious teachings. Individuals undergoing religious transformation benefit from being part of a nurturing environment that encourages spiritual growth.

Lastly, for individuals seeking personal transformation, this study underscores the value of self-reflection and openness to new perspectives. Participants' experiences suggested that engaging with faith-based communities can provide guidance, emotional stability, and a stronger sense of purpose. These insights are relevant not only for religious seekers, but also for counselors and spiritual advisors working with individuals who are undergoing major identity shifts.

Additionally, the findings suggest a need for faith-based institutions to intentionally promote inclusivity alongside spiritual formation. While participants benefitted from structured spiritual programming, non-Adventist students may require tailored support as they navigate a dominant religious culture. Institutions can foster a more inclusive environment by offering optional interfaith dialogue, creating safe spaces for religious questioning, and training faculty in culturally responsive and inclusive practices. These strategies can ensure that all students—regardless of background—feel respected, supported, and spiritually engaged.

Ellen G. White (1903) emphasized that “true education means more than pursuing a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being...” (p. 13). She advocated for an approach that cultivates individual conscience and character through love and patience, not compulsion. In this spirit, creating welcoming, grace-filled spaces for all students is aligned with the Adventist philosophy of education, which seeks to draw learners to Christ by “the power of love” rather than through pressure to conform (White, 1898).

Conclusion

This study underscores the vital influence of faith-based institutions in the complex process of identity formation, particularly among individuals who do not share the foundational faith of their host institution. The narratives of non-Adventist students at an Adventist international university revealed that immersion in a structured, values-oriented faith-based environment facilitates more than just spiritual engagement; it fosters a profound reconfiguration of personal identity. Participants’ experiences demonstrated that faith-based settings offered not only a framework for belief, but also a foundation for emotional stability, moral reasoning, and social integration. Such transformation was often gradual, emerging from repeated exposure to faith-informed practices, consistent ethical modeling by mentors, and the supportive infrastructure of a spiritual community.

The findings resonate with well-established psychological and sociological theories of identity development, particularly those emphasizing the interplay between environmental contexts and internal processes of self-construction. In this case, the institutional culture of the Adventist international university—marked by intentional spiritual programming, communal worship, and values-based education—acted as a crucible for the re-evaluation of personal beliefs and behaviors. Importantly, the study highlights the agency of the individual within these contexts, showing that identity formation is neither passive nor imposed, but emerges through reflective engagement and interpersonal relationships. The presence of compassionate mentorship, inclusive faith practices, and open dialogue appears especially critical in enabling students to explore, question, and sometimes adopt new religious identities.

Moreover, this research affirms the significance of belonging and purpose within identity development. For many participants, integration into the university’s faith-based community not only addressed existential questions but also provided a renewed sense of direction and meaning. These outcomes suggest that Adventist institutions serve as incubators for the holistic development of individuals, nurturing their ethical convictions, emotional resilience, and social consciousness.

While the scope of this study was limited to one institutional context, its implications extend to broader discourses on religious pluralism, educational missions, and the transformative potential of faith in multicultural settings. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to trace the durability of religious identity beyond the university setting. Additionally, cross-institutional comparisons involving various denominational affiliations could illuminate the unique and shared mechanisms through which faith-based education shapes the self. Attention should also be given to the tensions or negotiations that individuals may experience when reconciling prior beliefs with newly adopted religious perspectives.

In conclusion, the findings presented here advocate for the intentional design of inclusive faith-based environments that nurture personal growth, respect diversity, and encourage critical reflection. As identity formation continues well beyond formal education, ongoing scholarly engagement with the intersection of faith, education, and personal development remains essential. Such inquiry not

only enhances our understanding of how faith-based affiliation is internalized but also informs institutional practices that aim to support the spiritual and moral trajectories of all learners, regardless of their initial faith backgrounds.

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Factors Affecting Chinese Purchase Intention of Commercial Long-Term Care Insurance: A Consumer Cognition Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose: China has become the country with the largest elderly population and the fastest growth rate in the world; therefore, market demand for long-term care among Chinese consumers is growing increasingly large and urgent. To provide long-term care for consumers, commercial long-term care insurance is expected to become a new growth point for insurance companies as the state copes with an aging population. However, mechanisms that drive consumer cognition on purchase intentions of commercial long-term care insurance are still unclear. So taking the impact of consumer cognition on purchase intentions of commercial long-term care insurance as the core issue, this study explored how consumer cognition affected purchase intentions of commercial long-term care insurance.

Introduction: Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), along with content from a literature review and expert consultation, seven dimensions of consumer cognition variables were incorporated into a research model, including performance expectancy, social influence, culture concept, insurance knowledge, risk perception, trust, and personal norms. Attitude, which was theorized to have the strongest predictive ability for behavioral intention, was selected as the mediating variable, and its role in the path relationship between consumer cognition and purchase intention was investigated. Finally, a consumer purchase intention model was constructed from the perspective of consumer cognition that verified the influence of consumer cognition on purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance.

Methodology: In this study, an empirical analysis approach was employed. Permanent residents aged 45-59 in Henan Province were selected as the research subjects. For data collection, a survey method was adopted. Convenience sampling was used to distribute online questionnaires, and 400 valid questionnaires were recovered. For data analysis, a well-known statistical software package was used for descriptive statistical analysis, along with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling.

Findings: The results showed that consumer cognition had significant positive effects on purchase attitude ($\beta = .80, p < .001$) and purchase intention ($\beta = .23, p < .001$). Purchase attitude also exerted a significant positive influence on purchase intention ($\beta = .67, p < .001$). Meanwhile, purchase attitude ($\beta = .53, p < .001$) served as an important mediating variable in the impact of consumer cognition on purchase intention. The study's findings highlighted that enhancing consumer cognition of commercial long-term care insurance can significantly improve purchase attitude and intention.

Contribution: From the perspective of consumer cognition, the psychological mechanisms underlying consumers' purchase decisions for commercial long-term care insurance were explored. This study differed significantly from previous research on the purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance by examining aspects such as consumers' health conditions, income, and the situation of their children, providing a new theoretical perspective for studying consumers' purchase intention of insurance products. Furthermore, "consumer cognition" was introduced as a leading factor influencing attitude. While following the core framework of TPB, these findings expand the understanding of the cognitively driven mechanisms that form attitudes and enrich the application value of TPB theory in the field of complex insurance products.

Furthermore, the research results provide a clear direction for insurance enterprises to optimize their marketing strategies from the perspective of enhancing consumer awareness. At the same time, they also offer a feasible solution for the country to encourage consumers to purchase commercial long-term care insurance to alleviate the social pressure of elderly care. The findings also have positive policy reference value for promoting the sustainable development of an aging society.

Recommendations: Insurance companies can enhance consumers' intention to purchase commercial long-term care insurance by raising their levels of cognition. To enhance consumer cognition, efforts can be made based upon the seven dimensions for measuring consumer cognition, namely performance expectancy, social influence, culture concept, insurance knowledge, risk perception, trust, and personal norms. Similarly, to alleviate the pressure of an aging society, the state can also formulate policies and guidelines from the perspective of consumer cognition to promote consumer purchases of commercial long-term care insurance.

Research Limitations and Future Research: In this study, Henan Province in China was selected as the target area, a convenience sampling method was used to collect data, and the influence of consumer cognition on purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance was empirically analyzed. Future researchers could optimize three aspects of the research design, expanding it across other regions and cultures, along with increasing the sample size and number of influencing factors. This would enable a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the driving mechanisms of consumers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: *Consumer cognition, long-term care insurance, purchase intention*

Introduction

According to the classification standards established at the 1982 United Nations World Assembly on Aging, individuals aged 60 and above are defined as the elderly population (United Nations, 1982). Currently, China has become the country with the largest and fastest-growing elderly population in the world (Li, 2024). China's elderly population (≥ 60 years) is projected to reach 509 million (39% of the total population) by 2050 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2022). Among them, the population of the oldest (aged 80 and above) will reach 135 million, while the number of elderly individuals unable to care for themselves will rise to 11.59 million. A large elderly population and an increasing proportion of older adults have become the norm in human society (Peng, 2023). This has led to a tremendous demand for long-term care. However, alongside this trend, the traditional family-based caregiving function is gradually weakening. Older adults are receiving less support from their families, leading to an increasingly urgent and substantial demand for socialized care services.

Given the substantial and increasingly urgent market demand for long-term care among consumers, insurance companies have significant market opportunities by offering commercial long-term care insurance products that meet the needs of the elderly. The experiences of developed countries with large aging populations—such as the United States, Germany, and Japan—have demonstrated that commercial long-term care insurance is highly favored by consumers due to its ability to effectively address long-term care needs (Ding & Wei, 2016). However, research on long-term care insurance in China has primarily focused on aspects such as consumers' health conditions, income levels, and children's situations, lacking a micro-empirical and systematic exploration of the purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance from the perspective of consumer cognition. Against this backdrop, this study aimed to address the following questions:

1. How does consumer cognition influence the purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance?
2. How does consumer cognition affect attitude?
3. How does attitude influence purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance?
4. How does attitude play a mediating role in the impact of consumer cognition on purchase intention?

Literature Review

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

In 1991, Ajzen published an article entitled "*The Theory of Planned Behavior*", marking the official establishment of the TPB theory. This theory holds that attitude is one of the three key factors influencing an individual's behavioral willingness. Research has shown that when an individual holds a positive attitude towards a specific behavior, their behavioral intentions are significantly enhanced, and thus they are more likely to exhibit actual behavior. As the fundamental theoretical framework in the field of behavioral decision-making research, the TPB has demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in explaining and predicting individual behavioral decisions. It is notable that Ajzen and Driver (1991) emphasized that when applying this theory to a specific topic, researchers should appropriately expand the theoretical framework according to the research context and enhance its explanatory power and predictive effect by introducing new explanatory variables or path relationships.

Commercial Long-term Care Insurance

Commercial long-term care insurance is a branch of commercial health insurance that addresses disabilities resulting from old age or illness that require long-term care. Under normal circumstances, when the insured has difficulties in two or more standard daily living activities [such as bathing, dressing, eating, using the toilet, or transferring (getting out of bed or leaving the chair)], a claim will be triggered. (Cramer & Jensen, 2006). The payout can be insurance money or services aimed at assisting people with essential daily activities, such as medication management, shopping, household chores, and other health-related maintenance behaviors.

Consumer Cognition

Dori et al. (2017) defined cognition as the process by which consumers acquire, understand, and process knowledge through mental activities such as perception, thinking, and memory. Regarding consumer cognition of commercial long-term care insurance, Sun (2020) holds that consumer cognition is a multi-dimensional integrated concept. This study was based on integrating the Technology Acceptance Model with Katz's (1960) research, which posited that attitudes are formed by individuals based on their cognition of objects.

Consumer cognition is defined as their cognition, understanding, and evaluation of a series of factors that affect their willingness to purchase insurance, including a total of seven sub-dimensions: performance expectancy, social influence, culture concept, insurance knowledge, trust, risk perception, and personal norms. Consumer cognition is a kind of psychological construct that shapes an individual's attitudes and behavior towards purchasing insurance. Studies have shown that mental constructs are best measured by reflective indicators, because they are the fundamental factors that generate observational indicators (Hardin et al., 2008). In summary, consumer cognition is a reflective second-order variable, measured by a total of seven sub-dimensions: performance expectancy, social influence, culture concept, insurance knowledge, trust, risk perception, and personal norms.

1) *Performance Expectancy*. In this study, performance expectancy refers to consumer expectations regarding the effects of purchasing commercial long-term care insurance products. Yang (2021) found that performance expectancy had a significant positive impact on consumer intentions to purchase internet insurance. When Ma (2023) studied the impact of performance expectations on agricultural ecological security production behavior and grain growers' attitudes, performance expectancy was found to be an important factor influencing behavioral attitudes.

2) *Social Influence*. Social influence refers to the phenomenon where social forces cause changes in individuals' attitudes and behavior. Deconinck and Swinnen (2015) found that social influence had a major effect on beer consumption behavior in Russia. Ma (2023) found that social influence had a large effect on the attitudes of grain growers towards ecological and safe production behaviors.

3) *Culture Concept*. Sun (2020) found that the traditional Chinese concept of elderly care culture significantly and negatively affected consumer attitudes and willingness to purchase commercial long-term care insurance.

4) *Insurance Knowledge*. Lin and Prince (2015) found that the more consumers knew about insurance products, the greater their insurance demand would be.

5) *Trust*. Chen (2024) used a structural equation research model and found that trust was an important factor influencing the purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance among consumers in Nanning City. Brown et al.'s (2012) empirical analysis revealed that consumers' distrust of insurance companies restricted their enthusiasm for purchasing long-term care insurance.

6) *Risk Perception*. Bauer (1960) was the first to introduce risk perception from the field of psychology into consumer behavior analysis, proposing that consumers' subjective judgment and perception of risks were important factors determining their consumption behavior. Zhou and Chen (2013) found that risk perception can affect consumer demand for insurance products.

7) *Personal Norms*. Schwartz's (1977) Norm Activation Theory defined personal norms as self-expectations based on internalized values, which are an important factor influencing a person's will or behavior.

Attitude

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) noted that attitude refers to the positive or negative evaluation that individuals hold towards performing a certain behavior, which is usually influenced by behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations. Ajzen (1991) pointed out in the TPB that attitude is one of three major factors influencing an individual's behavioral willingness. An individual's beliefs about a certain behavior and their assessment of the outcome affect their attitudes towards performing that behavior and thereby influence their willingness to act. Many scholars have also confirmed that in addition to direct influence, behavioral attitudes can also serve as a mediating variable that affects behavioral willingness (Ebrahim et al., 2016).

In conclusion, based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, a research path of "Consumer Cognition—Attitude—Purchase Intention" was constructed to explore the psychological mechanism of consumers in the purchase decision-making of commercial long-term care insurance. To enhance the explanatory power of the TPB in specific situations, this study introduced "consumer cognition" as the antecedent variable of attitude. Seven sub-dimensions are proposed, including performance expectancy, social influence, culture concept, risk perception, insurance knowledge, trust and personal norm, revealing their influence on attitude and purchase intention. This research approach, while retaining the core structure of TPB, expands understanding of attitude formation mechanisms and enriches the application value of TPB theory to the field of complex insurance products.

Based on the above, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H_1 : Consumer cognition positively influences purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance.

H_2 : Consumer cognition positively influences attitude.

H_3 : Attitude positively influences purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance.

H_4 : Attitude mediates between consumer cognition and purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance.

Research Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

This study targeted permanent residents aged 45–59 in Henan Province as the research population. As one of China's most populous provinces, Henan exhibits significant growth potential in the commercial long-term care insurance market. The permanent population aged 45–59 reached 21.82 million by the end of 2022 (Henan Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Methodologically, a questionnaire survey approach was employed. A convenience sampling method was adopted for online questionnaire distribution. The minimum sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, yielding a requirement of 400 valid responses. During fieldwork, 478 questionnaires were distributed, and 400 valid responses were ultimately collected, meeting the study's sampling adequacy criteria.

Data Analysis Methods

In this study, a popular software package was employed for descriptive statistical analysis, with particular focus on demographic characteristics. Additionally, a second statistical analysis software package was utilized for data processing. Based on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS–SEM), this software enabled comprehensive multidimensional analyses including convergent validity assessment, discriminant validity testing, path coefficient estimation, and mediation effect verification (Hair et al., 2021). Research has demonstrated that the PLS–SEM approach offers significant advantages in model adaptability and computational efficiency (Guenther et al., 2023), making it particularly suitable for theoretical development and hypothesis testing in exploratory studies (Rahman et al., 2023).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The views of permanent residents aged 45–59 in Henan Province were studied. Among the 400 valid questionnaires collected, the sample comprised 193 males (48%) and 207 females (52%). Regarding educational attainment, 208 respondents (52%) had completed education at or below the high school/secondary school level, a characteristic consistent with the study's focus on the 45–59 age cohort. Occupational distribution showed enterprise employees as the largest group ($n = 134$, 34%), followed by self-employed individuals (20%) and freelancers (15%). Monthly income levels were predominantly clustered between ¥3,000–¥8,000 ($n = 216$, 54%), with 154 respondents (39%) reporting incomes exceeding ¥8,000.

Factor Loadings

According to Hair et al. (2016), the threshold for factor loadings in research projects should be set at .50, whereby items with loadings above this value are retained, while those below .50 are deleted. In this study, it was observed that the factor loading of Culture Concept on the second-order variable of consumer cognition fell below the .50 threshold, negatively impacting the overall results, consequently leading to the removal of Culture Concept from the model. All other measurement items demonstrated factor loadings exceeding .50 across their respective constructs, meeting the retention criteria without requiring elimination, as detailed in Table 1 (on the following pages).

Reliability Analysis

As presented in Table 2, both first-order and second-order constructs in this study demonstrated Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability (CR) values exceeding the recommended threshold of .70. These results confirmed adequate reliability for all measured constructs in the study.

Table 2 Construct Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Step I: First-Order		
AT	.92	.92
IK	.92	.93
PE	.88	.88
PI	.92	.92
PN	.84	.85
RP	.82	.84
SI	.89	.89
TR	.93	.93
Step II: Second-Order (Consumer Cognition)		
CC	.95	.89

Note. RP: Risk Perception; PE: Performance Expectancy; PN: Personal Norm; SI: Social Influence; IK, Insurance Knowledge; TR: Trust; AT, Attitude; PI: Purchase Intention; CC: Consumer Cognition

Table 1 *Factor Loadings*

Step I: First-Order								
	AT	IK	PE	PI	PN	RP	SI	TR
AT1	.87							
AT2	.93							
AT3	.93							
AT4	.87							
IK1		.84						
IK2		.66						
IK3		.89						
IK4		.92						
IK5		.91						
IK6		.89						
PE1			.84					
PE2			.87					
PE3			.85					
PE4			.86					
PI1				.93				
PI2				.93				
PI3				.93				
PN1					.86			
PN2					.76			
PN3					.77			
PN4					.89			
RP1						.61		
RP2						.83		
RP3						.82		
RP4						.77		
RP5						.76		
SI1							.88	
SI2							.91	
SI3							.89	
SI4							.79	
TR1								.85
TR2								.83
TR3								.85
TR4								.89
TR5								.89
TR6								.82
Step II: Second-Order (Consumer Cognition)								
	CC							
RP	.61							
PE	.81							
PN	.86							
SI	.87							
IK	.69							
TR	.76							

Note. RP: Risk Perception; PE: Performance Expectancy; PN: Personal Norm; SI: Social Influence; IK, Insurance Knowledge; TR: Trust; AT, Attitude; PI: Purchase Intention; CC: Consumer Cognition

Convergent Validity

As evidenced in Table 3, all constructs in the present study demonstrated average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding the established threshold of .50. This meant that all measured variables exhibited satisfactory convergent validity, confirming that the indicators sufficiently represented their respective theoretical constructs.

Table 3 Construct Convergent Validity (AVE)

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	
Step I: First-Order	
AT	.81
IK	.73
PE	.73
PI	.86
PN	.67
RP	.58
SI	.75
TR	.73
Step II: Second-Order (Consumer Cognition)	
CC	.60

Note. RP: Risk Perception; PE: Performance Expectancy; PN: Personal Norm; SI: Social Influence; IK, Insurance Knowledge; TR: Trust; AT, Attitude; PI: Purchase Intention; CC: Consumer Cognition

Fornell and Larcker Criterion

Fornell and Larcker (1981) established that discriminant validity is achieved when the square root of a construct's average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds the correlation coefficients of all the other constructs. As demonstrated in Table 4, all measured variables in this study satisfied the Fornell-Larcker criterion, thereby confirming adequate discriminant validity among the constructs. It should also be noted that the square root of the AVE value of variable PN (.82) was only slightly lower than its correlation coefficient with variable PE (.84), and that the other reliability and validity indicators of variable PE and PN (such as Cronbach's alpha, CR) were all good. Therefore, it can be reasonably explained that although the concepts of these two variables were similar, there were still differences, and they were still acceptable in practical applications. Hair et al. (2019) pointed out that when the square root of AVE is slightly lower than the correlation coefficient, it is acceptable as long as other measurement indicators are satisfactory and there is theoretical support.

Table 4 Fornell & Larcker Criterion First-Order

	AT	IK	PE	PI	PN	RP	SI	TR
AT	.90							
IK	.45	.86						
PE	.68	.30	.86					
PI	.85	.43	.65	.93				
PN	.72	.41	.84	.70	.82			
RP	.43	.21	.58	.45	.59	.76		
SI	.70	.48	.70	.68	.75	.49	.87	
TR	.66	.62	.42	.59	.48	.20	.57	.86

Note. RP: Risk Perception; PE: Performance Expectancy; PN: Personal Norm; SI: Social Influence; IK, Insurance Knowledge; TR: Trust; AT, Attitude; PI: Purchase Intention; CC: Consumer Cognition

Hypothesis Testing Results

Path coefficients and *p*-values were generated by a statistical software package to test the hypothesized model, with analytical results confirming the validation of all proposed hypotheses (H_1 – H_4). In accordance with Hair et al.'s (2010) methodological recommendations, the structural model

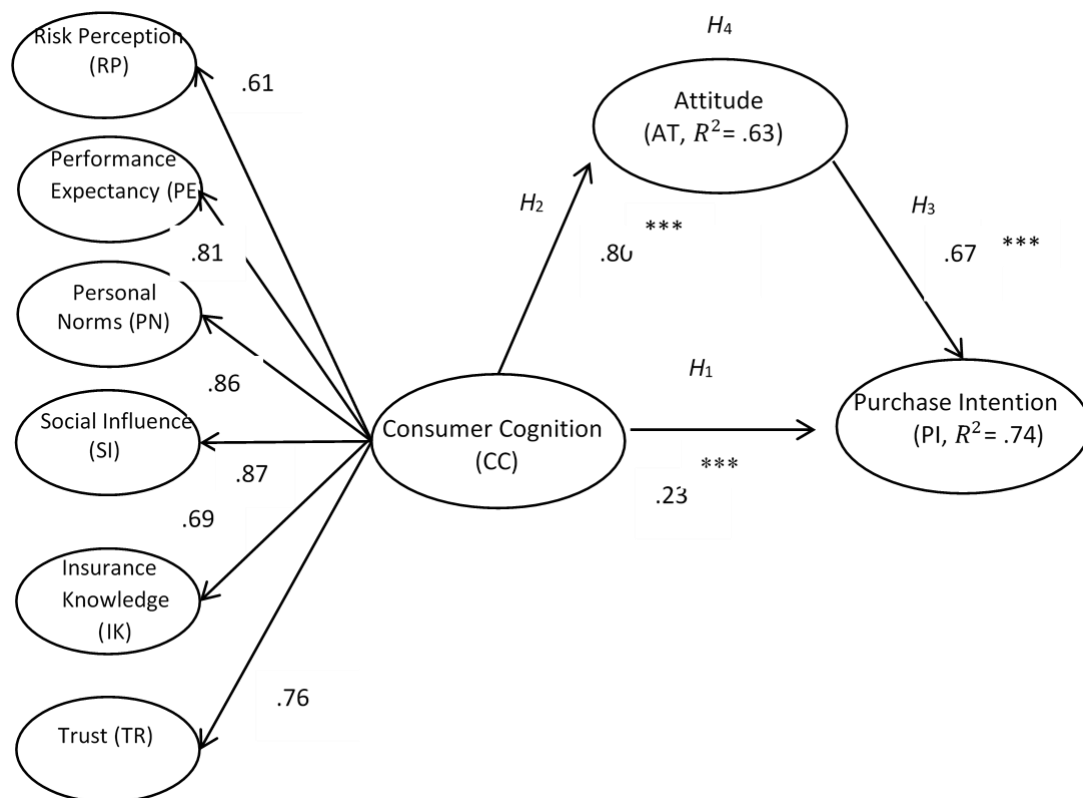
quality was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), revealing that purchase intention demonstrated an R^2 value of .74, while attitude showed an R^2 value of .63. Based on conventional R^2 evaluation standards (where .25 = weak, .50 = moderate, and .75 = substantial), these findings indicated that consumer cognition exhibits moderate to high explanatory power regarding commercial long-term care insurance purchase intentions in the current research context. The overall consumer cognition-based purchase intention model for commercial long-term care insurance achieved satisfactory predictive efficacy, as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5 Path Analysis

	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation (SD)	t statistics (O/SD)	p values	Adjusted R-Squared
CC -> AT	.80	.02	35.23	.000	.63
CC -> PI	.23	.04	5.37	.000	
AT -> PI	.67	.04	15.45	.000	.74
CC -> AT -> PI	.53	.04	13.70	.000	

Note. AT: Attitude; PI: Purchase Intention; CC: Consumer Cognition

Figure 1 Structural Model



Source: PLS-SEM (Bootstrapping results)

Discussion

Through the above empirical analysis, it was concluded that consumer cognition had a significant positive impact on both attitude ($\beta = .80$, $p < .001$) and purchase intention ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$). This was consistent with the research results of Chen et al. (2024), Ma (2023), Noon et al. (2020), Sun (2020), Wang (2020), Wang (2023), and Yang (2021). This indicated that the higher the level of consumer cognition, the more positive their attitudes towards purchasing commercial long-term care insurance,

and the higher their intentions to purchase. Furthermore, attitude had a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention ($\beta = .67, p < .001$), once again verifying the important conclusion proposed by Ajzen (1991) in the Theory of Planned Behavior that attitude is an important factor influencing an individual's behavioral intention. Finally, the results of this study also indicated that attitude played a mediating role in the influence of consumer cognition on their purchase intention ($\beta = .53, p < .001$). This was consistent with the research results of Ebrahim et al. (2016) and Sun (2020). Specifically, based on consumer cognition of commercial long-term care insurance, they would first form an attitude judgment towards taking such an action, and then generate a purchase intention.

Theoretical Implications

From the perspective of consumer cognition, this study explored consumers' psychological mechanisms related to purchase intentions of commercial long-term care insurance. This was different from previous research on the purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance from aspects such as consumers' health conditions, income, and children's situations, providing a new theoretical perspective for studying consumers' purchase intention of insurance products. Furthermore, "consumer cognition" was introduced as a leading factor influencing attitude. While following the core framework of TPB, these findings expand the understanding of the cognitively driven mechanisms that form attitudes and enrich the application value of TPB theory in the field of complex insurance products.

Managerial Implications

Consumers are the main purchasers of commercial long-term care insurance. Analyzing the internal driving factors of their intention to purchase commercial long-term care insurance from the perspective of consumer cognition, identifying their cognitive biases and demand pain points regarding commercial long-term care insurance, can not only provide information for insurance companies to develop commercial long-term care insurance products but also offer a basis for them to formulate relevant marketing strategies. In addition, China has been piloting long-term care insurance in the country since 2016, with the aim of alleviating the problem of population aging through long-term care insurance policies. Based on this study's conclusions, relevant departments can formulate policies at the national level to encourage and guide residents to purchase commercial long-term care insurance. From this perspective, this study provides new ideas for the country to alleviate the problem of an aging society.

Conclusion

Through empirical research, this study found that consumer cognition had a significant positive impact on the purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance, and that attitude played a mediating role. This conclusion provides a clear direction for insurance enterprises to optimize their marketing strategies by enhancing consumer cognition of their products. At the same time, it shows the need for the state to advocate that consumers purchase commercial long-term care insurance to alleviate the social pressure of elderly care. It also has positive policy reference value for promoting the sustainable development of an aging society.

Limitations and Future Research

In this study, Henan Province of China was selected as the target area, a convenience sampling method was used to collect sample data, and the influence of consumer cognition on the purchase intention of commercial long-term care insurance was analyzed. Future researchers could improve three aspects of the research design, expanding it across other regions and cultures, along with increasing sample size and the number of influencing factors. This would enable a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the driving mechanisms of consumers' purchase intentions.

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Integrating Values Education into Teaching: Perspective from Subject Teachers in Thailand

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study explored how Adventist teachers integrate values education into their teaching practices, and its impacts on student development within Christian educational contexts. It specifically focused on the integration of values education, particularly Biblical moral values, by science and mathematics teachers at Adventist International schools in Thailand.

Introduction/Background: Values education is essential for shaping students' character and moral compasses in today's era. Increasingly, growing evidence suggests a concerning trend of moral decline that has impacted the field of education. Reports of questionable attitudes, student altercations, and even criminal behavior among young people raise an alarm within communities. If these issues are not addressed, it will become increasingly difficult to find effective ways to strengthen both societal and student morality. Although the importance of moral education is widely recognized, research indicates that moral instruction is often treated as a separate subject instead of being integrated into academic learning. This separation can make values feel abstract or disconnected from students' real-life experiences and daily decision-making.

Christian school settings, particularly within the Adventist educational framework, are based on holistic development and aim to enhance students' spiritual, intellectual, physical, and moral growth. Adventist education prioritizes the word of God, the Bible, as the focus of knowledge. Teachers in Adventist education serve as spiritual mentors, integrating faith into their teaching methods. While this philosophy positions values education as integral to the curriculum, in practice, moral values are still at risk of being taught in isolation, limiting students' ability to recognize their relevance across subject areas. There is currently limited empirical evidence on how Biblical moral values are integrated into academic subjects, particularly in fields like science and mathematics. Additionally, few studies explore how this integration takes place at various stages of teaching—before, during, and after lessons. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how Adventist teachers can successfully integrate faith, values, and academic rigor, which is important for students' holistic development.

Methodology: This research employed a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach, focusing on the experiences of ten teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience in Adventist education. The study was conducted in three different provinces of Thailand, focusing on Adventist International Schools located in Bangkok, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Saraburi. These schools were chosen because their teachers and students come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, providing rich perspectives for exploring the integration of moral values in education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was employed to understand the teachers' experiences during three phases: pre-teaching, during teaching, and post-teaching. The study was validated through peer review and member checking to ensure accurate reflection of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Direct quotations were used to support analytical assertions and ensure the reliability, accuracy, and consistency of the coding process.

Findings: The findings revealed that during the pre-teaching phase, teachers intentionally planned moral values by setting clear moral objectives and using Biblical verses or stories that aligned with their lesson content. During the teaching phase, teachers connected Biblical values to lesson contents through real-life applications, facilitated discussions on moral issues, and served as models of Christian behavior. Teachers applied various pedagogical strategies and approaches, including analogies, cooperative, hands-on, experiential learning, critical thinking, consistent moral teaching, and fostering student autonomy, to make moral concepts engaging and meaningful for students. In the post-teaching phase, teachers reflected on the behavioral changes observed in students, such as increased classroom harmony, unity, respect, leadership, and responsibility. The study also found that integrating moral values has a lasting impact on students' moral development, providing lifelong guidance and protection.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This study provides practical insights for Christian teachers seeking to nurture moral growth alongside academic learning. It emphasizes the importance of intentional planning, various teaching strategies, including cooperative learning, hands-on experiences, critical thinking, metaphorical, mana-inspired leadership, and reflective practices. These strategies are crucial in shaping students' moral development within faith-based education systems. The study also contributes to a deeper understanding of how faith and education can be effectively integrated to support students' holistic development.

Recommendations: Schools in faith-based educational settings may consider implementing similar frameworks to promote moral reasoning and social responsibility. To facilitate the effective integration of faith and learning, schools should provide workshops on faith-based integration strategies, for example, connecting Biblical analogies in science and math, designing moral dilemma activities, promoting students' autonomy, cultivating positive mindsets, and encouraging collaboration among teachers to share best practices for integrating moral values into diverse subjects.

Research Limitation: This study's scope focused on the experiences of science and math teachers in Adventist International Schools. This limits its applicability to other subjects or educational institutions outside the context of Christian schools. While the study emphasized the role of teachers, it did not consider the perspectives of students, including students' viewpoints, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts and effectiveness of these practices.

Future Research: Future researchers are encouraged to collect data from multiple sources, including teachers' lesson plans, classroom observations, and student feedback surveys. Additionally, future studies replicating this study among non-Adventist Christians, secular institutions, or other cultural contexts may assess the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, conducting student-centered research may provide further enriched insights into the perceived impact of values education on their moral development.

Keywords: *Values education, Biblical moral values, Adventist education*

Introduction

Values education is important in shaping students' moral, ethical, and social development, equipping them with the skills and attitudes necessary for responsible citizenship and lifelong learning (Basha & Ramana, 2018). However, in recent years, the issue of moral decline has impacted the field of education (Louw, 2024). Reports of questionable attitudes, student altercations, and even criminal behavior among young people have raised concerns within the communities. If these issues remain unaddressed, developing effective strategies to improve both societal and student morality will become increasingly difficult (Waziana et al., 2021).

Christian schools, particularly within the Adventist education framework, have responded to this challenge by promoting values education as central to their mission. Hazeltine and Hernandez (2015)

noted that Christian schools focus on teaching character traits such as kindness, compassion, and respect. Adventist education prioritizes the word of God—the Bible—as the foundation of all knowledge, and promotes a philosophy of holistic development that nurtures students' spiritual, intellectual, physical, and moral growth (Taylor V, 2022). The teachers in Adventist education serve as spiritual mentors, integrating faith into their teaching method and modeling Christian principles in their interaction with students (Harvey, 2019). These efforts reflect a broader institutional commitment to developing moral values and socially responsible individuals.

However, despite this philosophy, values education is still at risk of being taught in isolation. Moral instruction is often compartmentalized as a separate subject, which can limit students' ability to see its relevance across academic disciplines (Gasimova, 2023). One study also suggests that moral education should be integrated into students' learning processes in schools. Research shows that while students are often taught cognitive skills, affective psychomotor dimensions of learning are frequently neglected (Waziana et al., 2021). Additionally, previous studies have highlighted that the traditional approach to teaching values education, or moral values as separate subjects, often isolates them from core academic subjects (Prastiwi, 2016).

This compartmentalized approach to teaching values education presents a significant challenge by limiting students' ability to apply moral principles in real-life situations and to academic topics in subjects like science and mathematics (Kilag et al., 2023). This separation leads students to view values as disconnected from real-life applications. The problem lies not simply in a lack of emphasis on values, but in the failure to meaningfully integrate them into disciplines where students spend most of their time. Some studies have emphasized the need for teachers to take a proactive role in promoting values (Eslit, 2023) and highlighted the importance of classroom management, student involvement, and teacher control during instruction (Balong et al., 2024). There is a need to investigate how values are effectively integrated throughout the teaching process (Çalışkan et al., 2021): pre-teaching, during teaching, and post-teaching.

This study aimed to fill this gap by exploring how science and math teachers in Adventist schools in Thailand integrate Biblical moral values into their teaching and their broader impacts on fostering inclusive and socially responsible behaviors. Hence, this research offers insights into how teachers promote moral development in their classrooms, and the effectiveness of values education within the faith-based educational framework. This study provides specific pedagogical approaches and classroom activities that support the integration of values in pre-teaching and during teaching. This study utilized qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis to help create guidelines and standards for integrating values education and moral values into academic subjects to enhance students' holistic development.

Literature Review

Values education is a type of education that emphasizes the importance of acquiring meaningful ideals for learners. It involves the transmission of principles that guide students' behavior, helping them distinguish between right and wrong and promoting qualities such as empathy, responsibility, and integrity (Biswas, 2023). As Proverbs 22:6 reminds us, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6, NIV). This reminds educators that moral instruction must be consistent and holistic, embedded into both daily routines and formal learning. Adventist Christian education emphasizes spiritual, moral, and intellectual development based on Biblical principles (Hazeltine & Hernandez, 2015). Both often integrate values education through curriculum design that combines faith and learning. Adventist education focuses on character development, highlighting its importance in nurturing knowledge and faith in students' lives (Taylor V, 2022). The essence of teaching in Adventist education is that it integrates academic rigor with character development, offering a variety of extracurricular activities, and the teachers serve as the true living curriculum (Nielsen, 2023).

In Adventist education, integration of faith and learning (IFL) is more than just fulfilling an institutional requirement for Christian schools; it aligns academic content with faith. The integration

of faith and learning is an opportunity for teachers to share their faith across all classroom disciplines. Thus, teachers employ content selection, instructional strategies, and assessment methods that reflect Christian values, ensuring that these principles are interwoven into daily learning experiences (Lampadan et al., 2021). Teachers guide students through life's challenges, academic subjects, hardships, and joys from a faith-centered perspective (de Zwaan, 2025). This holistic approach is aligned with Christian morality, emphasizing students' development as academically proficient individuals and as morally grounded and spiritually aware citizens (Newton, 2023).

Teachers' roles are meaningful in shaping students' values and overall development; they are not just instructors, but mentors who, through their actions and words, exemplify the moral behavior expected of students (Lovat & Hawkes, 2013; Unar et al., 2024). Thus, teachers employ content selection, instructional strategies, and assessment methods that reflect Christian values, ensuring that these principles are interwoven into daily learning experiences (Taylor V, 2022).

The role of teachers in Adventist schools is to prepare students for responsible citizenship in both the present world and the world to come. This approach highlights the integration of faith and learning, ensuring that Biblical principles are central to the curriculum and guide the educational process. Additionally, teachers in Adventist education serve as spiritual mentors, integrating faith into their teaching methods, and modeling Christian principles in their interactions with students (Harvey, 2019).

Research indicates that when teachers incorporate values education into their lesson plans, they often align their objectives and goals with clearly stated values. It is crucial to focus on six key elements: goals, objectives, materials and resources, teaching and learning methods, assessment, and activities outside the classroom. This strategy effectively encourages student engagement and creativity, while also fostering self-confidence, responsibility, and positive emotional relationships among teachers and students (Sipayung, 2019). During instruction, the teacher identifies the methods and strategies for values education that vary based on the chosen topics and their sources of development. Several techniques may be recommended, including classroom learning activities, practical activities, social interaction techniques, and incidental learning methods (Thakar, 2020).

Previous studies have demonstrated that values education is a crucial element of curriculum development. Values-based curriculum development encompasses various approaches that are tailored to address the diverse needs of learners, including holistic integration, interdisciplinary connections, experiential learning, inquiry-based instruction, and culturally responsive pedagogy. However, many challenges need to be addressed to ensure efficiency and success (Pandey, 2024). After integrating moral values in teaching, the need to assess the impact of values education involves evaluating whether the taught values are internalized and reflected in students' behaviors and attitudes. This can then be achieved through various methods such as observation, self-reflection, and peer feedback (Çalışkan et al., 2021).

Therefore, it is essential to hold professional development sessions where teachers can share ideas, exchange best practices, and collaboratively design integrated lesson plans. At the same time, teachers must respond to the diverse needs and backgrounds of their students, which can be particularly complex in varied socio-cultural contexts (Mohamad et al., 2019). To address these challenges, teachers often rely on school administrators for adequate resources and ongoing support. Several studies have highlighted the importance of professional development that focuses explicitly on value-based instruction, as it provides teachers with the strategies and confidence needed to successfully integrate values education into their teaching (Kilag et al., 2023).

Research Methodology

This study utilized a phenomenological qualitative research design. Qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of experiences, investigating values, beliefs, and attitudes (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). This study was conducted within the three different provinces of Thailand. The rationale for choosing Thailand was its globalizing educational landscape and the presence of numerous International schools. This study involved ten teachers from three Adventist International schools in

Thailand. Participants (Table 1) were selected through purposive sampling, which targets participants who can provide rich, relevant insights (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants were selected based on their active engagement in teaching, with a minimum of five years of teaching experience in Adventist schools.

Table 1 *Participants' Demographic Information*

No.	Participants	Demographic Information
1	Teacher A	A male teacher at an Adventist school in Saraburi who teaches math to middle and high school students.
2	Teacher B	A male teacher at an Adventist school in Saraburi who teaches math to the entire elementary school.
3	Teacher C	A female teacher at an Adventist school in Saraburi who teaches science to Grades 5–6.
4	Teacher D	A female teacher at an Adventist school in Saraburi who teaches science to Grade 5.
5	Teacher E	A male teacher at an Adventist school in Bangkok who teaches science at the elementary level.
6	Teacher F	A male teacher at an Adventist school in Bangkok who teaches math and science in Grade 2.
7	Teacher G	A female teacher at an Adventist school in Korat who teaches science at the elementary level.
8	Teacher H	A female teacher at an Adventist school in Korat who teaches science at the elementary level.
9	Teacher I	A female teacher at an Adventist school in Saraburi who teaches math and science at the elementary level.
10	Teacher J	A female teacher at an Adventist school in Korat who teaches math and science at the elementary level

This research used semi-structured interviews to gain a detailed understanding of participants' experiences. The interview questions presented in Table 2 were open-ended, which encouraged participants to share their experiences and opinions in their own words.

Table 2 *Interview Protocol*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. How do teachers integrate values education, specifically Biblical moral values into their teaching within Christian education contexts?	1. What is your understanding of moral values in the Bible, and how important are they in your teaching? 2. How do you plan your lessons to include these moral values in class? 3. How do you connect the moral values taught in your lesson to real life scenarios or societal issues? 4. Can you describe specific activities, lessons, or approaches you use to teach values? 5. How important do moral values appear to be in the lives of your students?
2. What are the impacts of integrating values education into the teaching?	6. What is your understanding of moral values in the Bible, and how important are they in your teaching? 7. Do you experience challenges or resistance when integrating values into your lesson? How do you handle these challenges? 8. Have you observed changes in your students' behavior or attitudes after emphasizing moral values in your teaching? If so, what kind of changes have you noticed? 9. Is there anything else that you would like to add that is relevant to this topic that I have not asked?

Open-ended questions also allowed participants to express themselves freely, revealing unexpected insights and new information. Otherwise, to ensure the interview questions were effective, the researcher sought expert feedback.

Primarily, the interview process involved obtaining permission from the school administrative offices and sending emails to inform each selected participant about the research procedures and

ethical considerations. Following Creswell's (2015) guidance on the data collection method, interviews were recorded with participants' consent to ensure an accurate and complete capture of their responses. The recordings were transcribed verbatim for thorough analysis. The data analysis in this study employed inductive thematic analysis, following the systematic process of Byrne (2022) to uncover emerging themes.

This process began with repeated readings of the interview transcripts to become familiar with their content and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. The data segments were then coded with labels. These initial codes were examined and grouped according to their similarities. Related codes were then organized into broader categories, which were refined and developed into overarching themes that addressed the research questions. To uphold ethical standards, participants were informed that all data would be used solely for this study and assured that their identities would be kept confidential. Actual names were replaced with codes such as Teacher A, Teacher B, etc.

For trustworthiness in analyzing the data, an iterative process was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the data and enhance the credibility of the findings. The findings were peer-reviewed by three former classmates who are researchers, and they agreed with the coding, ensuring that it was accurately represented and free from bias. Member checking was conducted by sending the findings back to participants to confirm that they accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, incorporating participant quotes allows readers to connect more deeply with the findings, providing rich insights into the teachers' experiences.

Results

The results answered the two research questions in two subsections: (a) how teachers integrate values education or moral values into their teaching, and (b) the impacts of integrating values education or moral values into their teaching.

How Teachers Integrate Values Education or Moral Values into Their Teaching

Interviews with ten teachers from three Adventist schools revealed how they integrated Biblical moral values into their pre-teaching, lesson planning, and the strategies they use during teaching.

Theme 1: Integrating Moral Values in Pre-Teaching

Teachers integrated Biblical moral values during the lesson planning. All teachers who emphasized the intentional integration of moral objectives within lesson planning were primarily guided by the school's framework, known as "Integration of Faith and Learning (IFL)." Teacher B emphasized the consistent incorporation of IFL components in their weekly lesson plans, demonstrating a systematic approach to integrating moral values. Teacher E reflected a broader philosophy, emphasizing that the school's focus extends beyond just GPA; it is also about building character. All participants interviewed demonstrated a similar strong commitment. "We put the IFL as a part of the lesson plan," embedding moral values in their lesson plans in accordance with the IFL framework, and prioritizing this aspect over a sole focus on academic content.

A crucial aspect of integrating moral values in pre-teaching involves incorporating Biblical moral values into the academic content. Teachers used Bible verses, stories, and faith-based explanations to enhance students' moral learning rooted in faith. Lesson plans also included strategies to nurture values such as honesty, respect, kindness, responsibility, and care for others. For example, Teacher A used the Bible verse Galatians 6:7 to illustrate the Biblical principle of cause and effect, connecting it to the concepts of correlation and regression. In mathematics lessons, Teacher B's focus would be on mathematical equations to emphasize fairness, while in science, Teacher D told students that they would explore symbiotic relationships to demonstrate interdependence and stewardship.

Moreover, in their lesson plans, teachers designed activities that aimed to engage students in moral development. The findings indicated that teachers reinforced moral values such as honesty, respect, and kindness through classroom discussions and hands-on activities. The planning activities

encouraged students to analyze real-life situations, fostering their moral reasoning and character growth. For example, teachers created activities that encouraged students to think critically through choices by presenting two distinct ideas regarding the origins of the universe: the Big Bang theory and Creationism. Teacher I used biological concepts to inspire students to consider transformative growth through hands-on activities in a garden. She conveyed the concept that challenges are integral to development, drawing a parallel between the seed that must 'die' to grow and the individual who must overcome obstacles to flourish. Using subject matter to reinforce moral values, introducing moral dilemmas, and employing analogies effectively fostered students' moral reasoning and character development.

The data analysis revealed that a significant aspect of teachers' lesson planning included assessing moral understanding. This assessment refers to strategies that teachers use to evaluate students' ability to analyze ethical dilemmas, make informed decisions, and engage in reflective practice. Teacher E emphasized how he assessed moral values regarding student autonomy in ethical decision-making. Teacher F evaluated the transformation in students' perspectives on moral values after integrating these values into classroom activities. This teacher implemented interactive activities that made abstract moral concepts more tangible. He explained, "I use activities where students jump to the left if an action is not right and jump to the right if it is a correct action."

Theme 2: Strategies During Teaching

The findings showed that teachers employed specific strategies during lessons to integrate Biblical moral values. These strategies included "Connecting Morals to Content and Real-Life" and "Fostering Engagement." Connecting morals to content and real life refers to not treating moral values as separate from academic content. They were woven into the subject matter, showing students how these values were important to their real world and their own lives. For example, Teacher A pointed out the similarities between solving complex math problems and dealing with challenges in life. He emphasized the importance of persistence and encouraged students to keep working through difficulties. Teacher G noted the importance of role-playing and group presentations for students to explore the concept of being helpful and kind, as in the story of "The Good Samaritan." Several participants described using cooperative learning to teach moral values such as teamwork, empathy, and shared responsibility.

Teachers also used scientific metaphors, such as "Ecosystem" and "Environmental Care," to teach the concepts of accountability and care for others. Teacher D emphasized the interconnectedness of different resources and their importance for human survival. The phrase "Interdependent Relationships" suggests that these resources rely on one another, and without them, our existence could be jeopardized. Teacher D pointed out that the well-being of humanity depends on understanding and valuing these connections. Teacher E implemented a "Space Project," which encouraged collaboration among students, and highlighted the importance of valuing everyone's unique contributions. Similarly, Teacher F organized role-play activities designed to simulate real-life moral decision-making, such as assisting others in emergencies and promoting healthy lifestyles. Additionally, teachers utilized experiential learning techniques to ensure that students not only grasped abstract concepts, but they also internalized moral values in their everyday lives.

The second sub-theme, "Fostering Engagement," refers to teachers discussing their efforts to maintain student engagement while integrating moral values. The strategies included consistent teaching in morals, fostering student autonomy, modeling, and cultivating a positive mindset. Most teachers believed that the consistent teaching of moral values allows students to witness the practical application of moral values over time. Hence, the teachers regularly reinforced moral lessons, integrating them into classroom management and daily interactions to help students apply these values in real-life situations. Some teachers promoted student autonomy through leadership roles and responsibilities in classroom tasks. Teacher E referred to a "mana-inspired leadership" strategy to encourage shared responsibility, enabling students to feel empowered to contribute and take the lead in their learning.

In this study, many teachers emphasized the importance of teaching and exemplifying Biblical values. They noted that students learn moral values through both classroom lectures and the actions and experiences of their teachers. They stressed the importance of staying connected with their students and ensuring that their lifestyles set a positive example. Moreover, teachers cultivated a positive mindset in students by encouraging them to practice gratitude and focus on the positive aspects of their lives. Recognizing and praising students immediately after they exhibit positive behavior is crucial for engaging students in lessons that integrate moral values.

Teachers' Insights After Integrating Values Education into Teaching

The integration of values education into teaching positively impacted students' behavior, influenced their moral values in the long term, and fostered unity in the classroom and in community relationships.

Theme 3: Perceived Impact of Values Integration

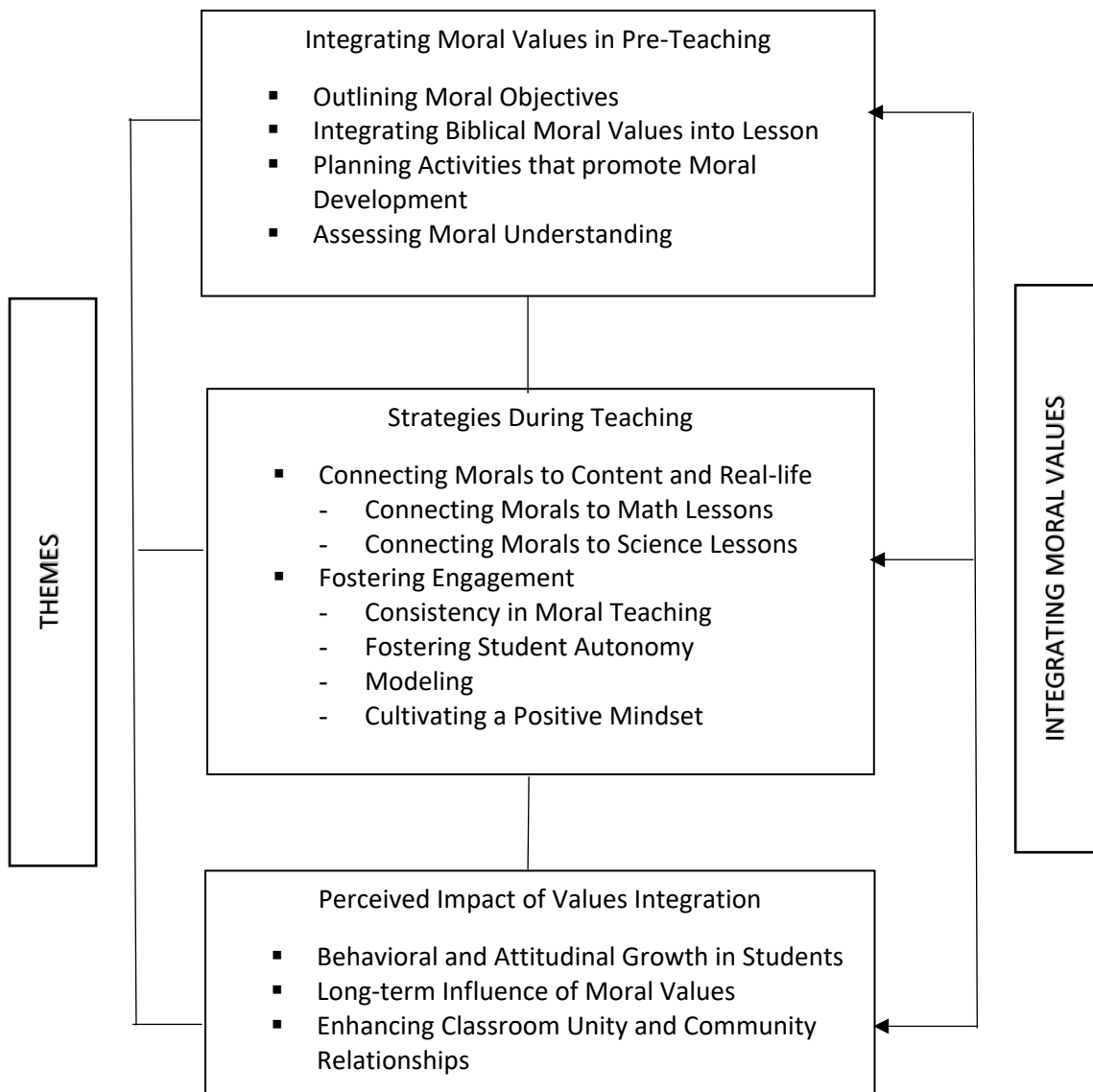
The participants shared that they observed positive changes after integrating moral values into their teaching. The teachers observed that students exhibited positive behavioral changes, including increased honesty, respect, patience, and a greater sense of accountability. Teacher E shared that students began to self-regulate and hold each other accountable for maintaining classroom discipline; he noted, "They remind one another to be honest, tidy up in the cafeteria, and keep quiet in the classroom. These behaviors fostered a positive atmosphere in our classroom." Teacher J shared that the parents noticed positive changes in their children's behavior, with students becoming more helpful and self-reliant. Teachers witnessed their students making independent moral decisions, seeking forgiveness, and being kind and supportive, like in the story of the good Samaritan.

Teachers in this study believed that integrating Biblical moral values had a long-term impact on their students' lives. Teacher A shared a story about former students who upheld their moral values when they entered university, despite facing peer pressure. Teacher D emphasized the lasting significance of these values and beliefs, stating that moral education serves as a foundational framework for students' future endeavors. Teacher B shared his experiences, noting positive feedback from parents and the community, who said, "AIMS students are polite and considerate toward one another." This feedback illustrates a strong sense of community and good behavior among the students. The teachers all agreed that while academic knowledge may fade, moral values remain essential to students' personal and professional lives.

The integration of moral values was also observed to improve classroom unity. Teachers noted stronger relationships among students and between students and teachers. Teacher A said that his students were more respectful and showed kindness and unity in the classroom. Teacher J stated that she received positive feedback from other teachers, such as that her students were well-behaved outside the classroom. Teacher E observed the role of moral values in creating a harmonious and supportive classroom environment. Teachers reported that students became more cooperative, respectful, and willing to engage in collaborative tasks. The classroom environment was described as more unified and harmonious. Teachers also observed that students began demonstrating leadership, discipline, and responsibility, contributing to a positive and caring school community.

Figure 1 provides a summary of themes and sub-themes that contribute to the development of holistic settings for Christian education, and how teachers may integrate moral values into their teaching and learning activities.

Figure 1 *Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes*



Data Analysis Results: Themes and Findings

The study on the integration of values education or moral values in math and science teaching in Adventist International schools and the impacts of integration, particularly focusing on the intentional integration of moral values during pre-teaching, during teaching, and the impacts of positive outcomes observed post-teaching. It was found through thematic analysis that there were three themes and nine sub-themes.

Discussion

According to a review of the existing literature, the theme of “Integration of Faith and Learning (IFL)” is the foundation of faith-based learning in Adventist schools (Harvey, 2019). Previous studies have pointed out that IFL is central to Christian education, shaping students’ values, beliefs, and behaviors (Lampadan et al., 2021; de Zwaan, 2025). The findings of this study build on that foundation by showing how teachers in Adventist schools have moved beyond theoretical ideals to actively integrate IFL into their classroom practices. Teachers emphasized character development alongside academic achievement. They have demonstrated that integration of faith and learning is not just a philosophical stance; it also a practical pedagogical commitment. This demonstrates the practical

significance of IFL in shaping students' holistic growth, involving students' physical, social, spiritual, and intellectual development.

By integrating faith-based discussions into subjects such as mathematics and science, teachers may create learning experiences that encourage both cognitive and moral reflection. This clearly indicates that disciplines regarded as value-neutral can serve as platforms for values education. While Harvey (2019) emphasized the importance of holistic development, this study showed how teachers have implemented this principle in their lesson planning and assessments. Thus, the findings affirm prior research and extend it by providing strategies—such as content selection, instructional approaches, and reflective assessment—that make the integration of Christian values tangible in everyday classroom practice.

The study also revealed that teachers' lesson planning extended beyond mere content delivery; it actively fostered students' moral development through carefully designed activities. These design activities helped students understand abstract moral values and encouraged them to apply these principles in their daily lives. The teachers' experiences were aligned with a study by Zarrett et al. (2021), which emphasized that interactive and experiential learning methods, such as play-based activities, exploration, real-life experiences, and concrete examples, could help children to actively engage with moral dilemmas. However, the contribution of this study is its focus on how Adventist teachers have applied experiential methods within a Biblical framework. This approach transforms activities into opportunities for critical reflection and ethical decision-making. The integration of moral dilemmas and critical reflection complements the values emphasized in Adventist education, which connects faith-based values to learning experiences, transforming learners' hearts and minds (Harvey, 2019).

Teachers assessed students' moral understanding through reflective exercises, moral dilemmas, and ethical decision-making discussions. By prioritizing student autonomy in ethical decision-making, teachers encouraged them to internalize Biblical principles. This practice primarily aligns with the Adventist education framework by periodically assessing how faith and learning are integrated in the classroom (Harvey, 2019). Furthermore, this study extended the understanding of how assessment can be used to measure moral knowledge, as well as to cultivate personal responsibility and ethical independence. This also aligns with the principles of the Christian Religious Education framework, which emphasizes values like love, justice, sharing, and responsibility as crucial for teenagers' moral development (Sianturi & Romika, 2024). For instance, one math teacher addressed self-centeredness by using cooperative learning activities, demonstrating that moral growth can be integrated into academic problem-solving.

Teachers' strategies also revealed how moral values can be made relevant to students' lived experiences. By using analogies and real-life applications, teachers connect moral teachings to everyday contexts. This aligns with a study that highlights the importance of methods addressing real-life challenges and promoting experiential learning in moral education (Cui et al., 2024). The researchers found that Adventist teachers intentionally linked moral challenges to Biblical principles within their academic subjects. For instance, mathematics lessons served as an opportunity to teach perseverance and ethical problem-solving, while previous literature has indicated that teachers in Adventist schools support students in facing life's challenges, understanding academic subjects, overcoming hardships, and embracing faith-centered perspectives (de Zwaan, 2025).

Similarly, science teachers employed authentic, hands-on learning approaches that connected lessons to societal issues and Biblical metaphors. The use of the Parable of the Sower, for example, transformed the classroom into a "living garden" where abstract moral principles were made visible and tangible. Teachers expressed that they used this approach to foster critical thinking and encouraged students to engage deeply with the moral implications of the lessons. While Nielsen (2023) emphasizes that Adventist education integrates academic rigor with character development, this study demonstrates how teachers creatively and meaningfully integrate knowledge, reinforcing both understanding and faith.

The findings also revealed the balance between providing moral guidance and fostering autonomy. Teachers can create a supportive environment that encourages students to actively participate in moral discourse while also respecting their independent choices. Teachers aimed to instill values, cultivate positive mindsets, and empower students to make ethical choices independently. This balance resonated with Arvanitis & Kalliris (2020); however, the findings illustrated how Adventist teachers achieved this balance in practice through trust, relational teaching, and opportunities for dialogue. The teachers' strategies for instilling moral values reflected Christian principles and Adventist educational practices.

The teachers in this study reported that integrating Biblical moral values into teaching produced transformative effects on students' behavior, attitudes, and relationships. Students became more respectful, empathetic, and responsible. This observation affirmed that values education and moral education are essential in shaping students' character and fostering ethical values, empathy, and social responsibility (Biswas, 2023; Hafizi & Wiyono, 2023; Saadia et al., 2024). Moreover, this study demonstrated how these changes can be achieved through intentional classroom strategies, such as positive reinforcement, mana-inspired leadership, and showing practical pathways by which values education can influence student moral development.

Additionally, improved classroom unity and stronger, more respectful teacher-student relationships observed in this study highlighted the role of values education in shaping a caring and inclusive school environment (Kilag et al., 2023). A positive atmosphere such as this fosters learning and helps students feel a sense of belonging. An inclusive school culture significantly shapes behaviors within the educational community and impacts the experiences of all members, both in school and at home (Fernández-González & Akrivou, 2024). By situating these findings within Adventist education, the study emphasized that moral education may transform individuals and cultivate communities. This communal aspect highlights the lasting impact of values education, which, as Daniels (1981) stated, is a lifelong endeavor requiring sustained commitment.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on science and math teachers in three Adventist schools in Thailand. The findings may not be generalized to other subject areas, secular institutions, or faith-based schools with different characteristics. Additionally, the research relied on teachers' self-reported data through semi-structured interviews, without including student perspectives, classroom observations, or document analysis, such as lesson plans. Moreover, as this study was conducted in three Adventist International Schools in Thailand, this limits the generalizability of its findings to other cultural or educational contexts. The unique philosophical basis of Adventist education may not reflect experiences found in other educational settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should include gathering student perspectives, which could help reveal the differences between the impacts reported by teachers and the actual lived experiences of students. Additionally, classroom observations and document analysis, such as reviewing lesson plans and student work, would provide valuable context. Lastly, comparative studies should be conducted between Adventist schools and other Christian or secular institutions to examine how moral integration varies across different contexts.

Conclusion

The findings showed that teachers intentionally integrated moral values in their teaching. In pre-teaching, teachers outlined their moral objectives, which were aligned with the school's framework of Integration of Faith and Learning (IFL). They incorporated Bible verses or stories, value-based activities, and assessment of moral understanding into their lesson plans. During teaching, teachers used strategies and approaches, such as cooperative learning, real-life analogies, role-play, and moral questioning to foster critical thinking and student engagement.

Beyond instructional strategies, teachers used consistent moral teaching, fostering student autonomy, modeling values in their behavior, and cultivating a positive mindset through daily classroom interactions. Post-teaching observations showed that students demonstrated behavioral and attitudinal growth, including increased respect, honesty, and responsibility. Teachers also reported long-term moral retention and stronger classroom unity as lasting impacts of integrating moral values.

The implications of this study highlight the importance of equipping teachers with strategies to integrate moral values into their academic content. In Christian education, particularly within the Adventist schools, moral values integration is more impactful when teachers intentionally align their plans with the school's framework IFL, provide real-life applications, allow for student autonomy, consistently reinforce moral values, and serve as a role model in teaching moral values. These factors foster holistic student development.

The study offers pedagogical implications for content teachers within Adventist and non-Adventist schools who are seeking to integrate values education. For the content teachers in Adventist schools, they can integrate the moral values by beginning with intentional planning by outlining clear moral objectives that align with the IFL framework and connect Biblical moral values to subject content. In the Adventist educational sector, this study offers practical strategies, including the incorporation of Bible verses and stories, as well as the design of reflective activities that promote moral reasoning.

In both Adventist and non-Adventist schools, teachers can integrate moral values by connecting them directly to content and real-life scenarios, using methods like cooperative learning, role-play, and experiential activities. Pedagogical approaches should promote active student engagement with moral dilemmas and practical applications of values. The findings highlight the importance of fostering student autonomy, consistently reinforcing moral principles, and having teachers model values in their daily interactions. These strategies and approaches can effectively impact students' understanding and application of values education.

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Program Quality and Viewer Satisfaction: A Study of Hope Channel Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This research study aimed to address a lack of insight into the viewing behaviors and preferences of Hope Channel Southeast Asia's audiences. By examining content engagement, program length, media access, and content sharing behavior, the study endeavored to help the channel create more relevant programming. It also identifies regions with strong viewership to improve outreach and tailor promotional efforts. Understanding these dynamics is particularly important in the context of a rapidly evolving digital media landscape.

This research also sought to examine the relationship between audience perception and overall satisfaction with Hope Channel Southeast Asia programs. Beyond identifying viewing habits and engagement, it aimed to measure how viewers' perceptions of program quality—such as clarity of content, presenter effectiveness, technical production, and cultural relevance—influence their level of satisfaction and willingness to recommend the channel to others. By investigating this relationship, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how perception drives satisfaction in faith-based media consumption. This objective is particularly important because it provides evidence-based insights to design programming strategies that would not only attract viewers, but that also sustain long-term engagement and loyalty.

Introduction/Background: Building on previous research about social media's role in religious outreach, the study explored the relationship between program quality and viewer satisfaction in the digital age. It investigated how content clarity, presenter style, technical quality, and cultural relevance influence viewer satisfaction and engagement. These factors were examined through the lens of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Social Exchange Theory, which provided a framework for understanding audience motivation and the perceived rewards associated with media consumption.

Methodology: To explore these factors, a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional research design was employed. A survey utilizing a structured online questionnaire captured demographic information, viewer behaviors, satisfaction ratings, and a Net Promoter Score. Satisfaction was measured based on the perceived quality of program content, presenter effectiveness, technical quality, and perceived benefits for viewers. The target population consisted of followers of Hope Channel Southeast Asia on social media, estimated at around 20,800, with actual viewership likely exceeding this figure. A quota sample was used to ensure proportional representation across three key language groups: English (36%), Bahasa Malaysia (37.5%), and Thai (26.5%). The survey was available in all three target languages and took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete; a total of 359 responses were received. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Findings: The study's findings revealed that Hope Channel Southeast Asia predominantly engages audiences between the ages of 21 and 50, with a slight majority of male viewers. The largest groups of respondents were from Malaysia and Thailand, and 83.88% of them identified as Seventh-day Adventists. Viewing habits varied by language group: English speakers tended to watch daily, Malays watched less frequently, and Thais engaged mostly on a weekly basis. Satisfaction levels were generally high across all groups, with mean scores above 3.41 for content quality, presenter style,

technical aspects, and perceived program benefits. However, some areas for improvement were identified, such as video consistency, presenter persuasiveness, and emotional engagement. Respondents expressed interest in topics related to health, family, Bible-based teachings, and addiction recovery, particularly among Thai viewers, while a large portion of respondents expressed willingness to share content.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This study contributes to the existing literature on Christian media by showing that Hope Channel Southeast Asia effectively reaches younger and middle-aged viewers, especially through short-form content on mobile and social media platforms. It also confirmed that perceived content quality—clarity, presenter expertise, and technical production—strongly influences viewer satisfaction, supporting the Uses and Gratifications and Social Exchange theories. The research highlighted evolving expectations for higher production quality in faith-based media, suggesting that viewers are increasingly seeking professional standards, even in religious programming. A significant contribution of this study was its identification of culturally specific content preferences, such as the Thai audience’s interest in addiction recovery. This emphasizes the need for localized and culturally relevant programming.

Recommendations: Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed for Hope Channel Southeast Asia. For English-speaking audiences, the channel should increase production of short-form, mobile-friendly content that blends spiritual insights with practical life applications. Malay programming should include more interactive formats, such as panel discussions and question-and-answer segments, alongside deeper spiritual content that resonates with local cultural values. For Thai audiences, the focus should be on addiction recovery, mental health, and personal transformation, with content that incorporates local testimonies and emotionally authentic presenters. Across all groups, improving technical quality, particularly video sharpness and audio clarity, along with enhancing presenter persuasiveness and emotional connection, would be crucial for fostering deeper engagement.

Research Limitations: While this research provides valuable insights, it has several limitations. The sample was predominantly composed of Seventh-day Adventists (83.88%), which may skew preferences and satisfaction trends, reducing generalizability to broader Christian or interfaith audiences. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling and reliance on online surveys likely overrepresented digitally engaged viewers, while underrepresenting those who consume content through traditional broadcast or offline means. Self-reported data also introduces the possibility of social desirability and memory biases, and the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents the analysis of long-term trends or causality.

Future Research: To address these limitations, future research could use stratified random samples to include a broader demographic representation. Longitudinal studies would enable researchers to track satisfaction changes over time as programming adjustments are implemented. Moreover, adopting a program-specific evaluation model where viewers assess individual programs would provide data that are more detailed and actionable. Finally, qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups, would allow for a deeper understanding of the emotional and cultural factors influencing viewer satisfaction and content sharing.

Keywords: *Hope Channel Southeast Asia, viewer satisfaction, program quality*

Introduction

In today’s digital and interconnected world, Christian media plays an increasingly vital role in reaching diverse audiences with spiritually enriching content. As traditional media consumption continues to evolve, religious broadcasting networks like Hope Channel have expanded their reach through various digital platforms to remain relevant and effective. Hope Channel Southeast Asia (HCSEA), serving audiences across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, stands at the forefront of this shift, operating in a region characterized by a blend of religious diversity, technological

advancement, and evolving media habits. Understanding how viewers interact with content, perceive program quality (Lillard, 2022), and express satisfaction is crucial for ensuring that the channel's mission continues to resonate meaningfully within this complex environment.

This study addressed the growing need to systematically examine viewer engagement and satisfaction among Hope Channel Southeast Asia's (HCSEA) audiences. HCSEA is the regional affiliate of a global media ministry operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is dedicated to sharing God's love and promoting faith, community, and vibrant health through culturally relevant programming in multiple languages throughout Southeast Asia (Lee & Chow, 2022). The study specifically investigated three key areas: (a) the demographic backgrounds and viewing habits of HCSEA audiences, (b) the relationship between perceived program quality and viewer satisfaction, and (c) strategies that could improve program effectiveness to attract and retain a wider viewership. These objectives were framed within established theoretical models—Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), Uses and Gratifications Theory (Ruggiero, 2000), and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1999; Schunk, 2012)—which together offer a multi-faceted lens to understand the motivations behind media consumption, the value that audiences derive from content, and the behavioral patterns linked to media engagement and sharing (Webster, 1986; Musonda, 2022).

Prior research in Christian media engagement, including studies on Hope Channel North America, has emphasized the importance of content relevance, emotional resonance, and accessibility. However, the unique cultural and regional dynamics of Southeast Asia necessitate a localized understanding that extends beyond North American models. Emerging trends reveal that Southeast Asian viewers, particularly younger demographics, increasingly access religious content through mobile devices and prefer short-form, visually dynamic media formats (Moore College, 2020). Despite this shift, little systematic research has been conducted to specifically analyze Hope Channel Southeast Asia's performance in meeting these changing audience expectations.

To address this research gap, a cross-sectional survey method was utilized to gather data from respondents across English, Malay, and Thai-speaking viewer groups. This survey captured a broad spectrum of information, including demographic profiles, viewing frequencies, satisfaction across multiple dimensions of program quality (Szyndlar, 2023), and suggestions for future programming improvements. The study also critically examined how cultural context influences content preferences.

By systematically analyzing these factors, the researchers aimed to provide actionable insights for Hope Channel Southeast Asia's content creators, strategists, and leadership team. They sought not only to affirm what was working, but also to highlight specific areas where strategic adjustments could enhance engagement and satisfaction. In doing so, this study may contribute to the broader academic discourse on Christian media engagement in the digital age, offering lessons that may be applicable beyond the Southeast Asian context to other regions that face similar challenges of audience diversification and technological change. Ultimately, the findings may help to inform future content development, digital strategy refinement, and audience relationship-building efforts, ensuring that Hope Channel Southeast Asia remains a vibrant and transformative media ministry.

Literature Review

The advancement of digital technology has transformed how audiences engage with Christian media, creating new opportunities and challenges for religious broadcasters. Scholars such as Nduka and McGuire (2017) and Reddy (2019) have highlighted the shift from traditional television consumption to diverse digital platforms, emphasizing the importance of adapting content to meet the changing needs of believers and seekers. As Christian media outlets expand their digital footprints, it becomes increasingly important to understand the dynamics of viewer engagement, content satisfaction, and program effectiveness within different cultural and regional contexts (Dunaetz, 2019).

Previous research has extensively explored the intersection of technology, faith, and media. Wise (2014) argued that the relevance of Christian media lies in its ability to leverage digital platforms to foster community and spiritual connection. Brubaker and Haigh (2017) similarly emphasized that technological adaptation is critical for maintaining relevance, particularly as younger generations

increasingly consume content through mobile applications, social media, and streaming services. Hope Channel North America, serving as a case study, provided additional insights into viewer engagement trends. According to its Department of Analytics and Innovation, North American viewers primarily access Hope Channel content through cable TV, TV apps, and websites, with the largest viewer group composed of women over the age of 60 (J. Burt, personal communication, December 27, 2022). Engagement strategies have primarily targeted traditional media consumers, and patterns of content sharing were modest.

In contrast to prior studies, this research on Hope Channel Southeast Asia addressed a gap in the literature by focusing on highly mobile, digitally active, and culturally diverse audiences in Southeast Asia. The demographic profile captured in this study is notably different from North America: viewers come from Malaysia, Thailand, and surrounding countries, with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, other Christians, and atheists watching alongside Seventh-day Adventist viewers. Moreover, daily engagement patterns show strong influence from short-form content such as reels—particularly among English-speaking viewers—a finding not extensively documented in previous research.

While prior studies have identified content relevance, authenticity, and emotional resonance as drivers of viewer satisfaction (Nduka & McGuire, 2017; Ratcliff et al., 2017), this study built on these concepts by applying them within the regional context of Southeast Asia. While these factors remain critical, cultural and societal issues also play important roles in shaping content preferences. Furthermore, commercial marketing research, as cited by Gossen et al. (2019) and Appel et al. (2020), has underscored the effectiveness of short, visually engaging, and emotionally resonant content for maximizing online engagement.

Research Questions, Hypothesis, and Conceptual Framework

Research Questions

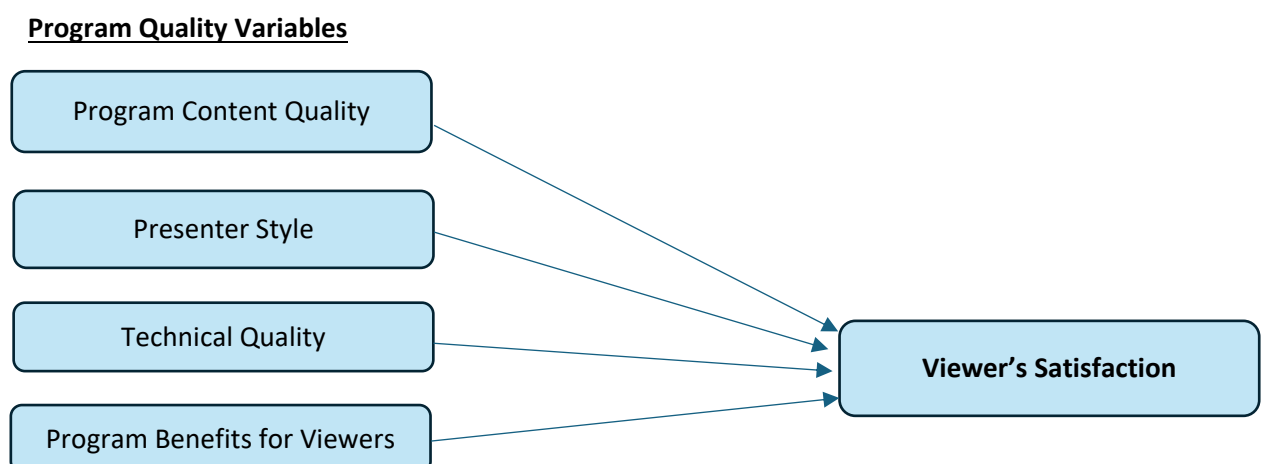
1. What are the demographic backgrounds and viewing habits of Hope Channel Southeast Asia viewers who view its English, Malay, and Thai programs?
2. What is the relationship between perceived program quality (Program Content, Presenter Style, Technical Quality, and Program Benefits) and viewer satisfaction?
3. How could Hope Channel Southeast Asia improve its program quality to attract and retain more viewers?

Hypothesis H_{1A} : There is a significant positive relationship between program quality and viewer satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework is shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*



This study examined the relationship between program quality—including content quality, presenter style, technical quality, and program benefits—and viewer satisfaction for Hope Channel Southeast Asia. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory, the model hypothesized that higher program quality would lead to increased engagement and greater viewer satisfaction. Reflecting previous studies on Christian media trends and digital content consumption, this framework highlighted the importance of culturally relevant and high-quality programming. It provides a foundation for improving content strategies to better attract, satisfy, and retain viewers in Southeast Asian digital landscapes.

Methodology

In this study, a quantitative, descriptive, and correlational research design was adopted to examine the relationship between Hope Channel Southeast Asia's program quality and viewer satisfaction. Data were collected using a structured online survey questionnaire, divided into two main sections: (1) demographic information (Investopedia, 2023), and (2) factors influencing satisfaction, including content quality, presenter style, technical quality, and perceived program benefits.

The study targeted current viewers of Hope Channel Southeast Asia across English, Bahasa Malaysia, and Thai-speaking groups. The estimated population for all three languages, based on social media followers, was between 10,000 and 100,000. Using standard sample size guidelines (Veal, 2005), a minimum sample of 383 participants was sought to ensure a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error (Hertzog, 2008). Quota sampling was employed to proportionally represent each language group according to their share of total followers: 36% English, 37.5% Bahasa Malaysia, and 26.5% Thai.

After examining the instrument and data collection plan, permission and ethical approval for the study was granted by the Asia-Pacific International University Research Committee (AIU.RO. 23(4)/2023, 28 November 2023). Ethical standards were maintained by inviting—but not pressuring—potential respondents to participate, and by ensuring that their responses were confidential.

To ensure validity, the survey instrument was reviewed by two media research experts and pretested with a small group of 30 respondents to confirm clarity, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives. Construct validity was reinforced by adapting items from established satisfaction studies in media research. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which demonstrated strong internal consistency across all satisfaction dimensions ($\alpha = .82-.91$). These steps ensured that the instrument provided accurate and dependable measures of audience perceptions and satisfaction.

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure viewer satisfaction across content quality, presenter style, technical quality, and program benefits. Scores were categorized as follows: 4.21–5.00 (Very Satisfied), 3.41–4.20 (Satisfied), 2.61–3.40 (Somewhat Satisfied), 1.81–2.60 (Dissatisfied), and 1.00–1.80 (Very Dissatisfied). This scale provided a clear and consistent method to quantify and interpret audience perceptions.

Participants were recruited through invitations posted on Hope Channel's social media platforms, website banners, web streaming pages, and call-to-action messages. A convenience sample was thus obtained, with access to the survey provided via direct links and messaging, and a total of 359 usable responses were received.

Findings/Results

Research Question #1: What are the demographic backgrounds and viewing habits of Hope Channel Southeast Asia viewers who view its English, Malay, and Thai programs?

Demographic Backgrounds of Viewers

Age

The age distribution of viewers across the English, Malay, and Thai groups revealed notable patterns, which are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1 *Hope Channel Viewer Ages by Program Language Group (n = 359)*

Language/Age	≤ 20	%	21–35	%	36–50	%	≥ 51	%	Total
English	10	6.90	78	53.79	41	28.28	16	11.03	145
Malay	9	7.97	50	44.25	43	38.05	11	9.73	113
Thai	13	12.87	42	41.59	41	40.59	5	4.95	101
Total	32	8.91%	170	47.36%	125	34.82%	32	8.91%	359

In the English-speaking group, most respondents (53.79%) were aged 21–35, followed by 28.28% who were aged 36–50, suggesting that younger to mid-aged adults formed the core audience. Similarly, in the Malay group, 44.25% of respondents were aged 21–35 and 38.94% were 36–50, reflecting a strong middle-aged viewership. The Thai group displayed a slightly more balanced distribution between the 21–35 (41.58%) and 36–50 (40.59%) age categories, with fewer respondents under 20 (12.87%) or over 51 (4.95%). Across all three groups, the 21–35 and 36–50 age ranges together accounted for most respondents, highlighting that Hope Channel Southeast Asia primarily reaches a young to middle-aged demographic, rather than a predominantly older audience.

Gender

The gender of Hope Channel Southeast Asia’s viewers for each language group is shown below in Table 2. Overall, male viewers accounted for 54.88% of the total respondents, while female viewers represented 45.12%, indicating a slightly higher male viewership.

Table 2 *Gender Distribution for Respondents from All Language Groups (n = 359)*

Age	Male	%	Female	%	Total
English	79	54.48	66	45.52	145
Malay	57	50.44	56	49.56	113
Thai	61	60.40	40	39.60	101
Total	197	54.88	162	45.12	359

The English and Malay groups showed a relatively balanced gender distribution, with males comprising 54.48% and 50.44% of viewing audiences, respectively. However, the gender gap was more noticeable in the Thai group, where males made up 60.39% of viewers.

Religion

Table 3 presents the religious affiliation of respondents from all language groups.

Table 3 *Religious Affiliation of Respondents from All Language Groups (n=359)*

	SDA	%	Christian	%	Buddhist	%	Other*	%	Atheist	%	Total
English	130	89.66	9	6.20	0	0	3	2.07	3	2.07	145
Malay	96	84.96	11	9.73	1	.88	2	1.77	3	2.65	113
Thai	75	74.26	9	8.91	15	14.85	2	1.98	0	0	101
Total	301	83.84	29	8.08	16	4.46	7	1.95	6	1.67	359

Note. *Other Religions=Hindu or Muslim

The religious affiliation of Hope Channel Southeast Asia viewers revealed a predominantly Seventh-day Adventist audience. Among 359 respondents, 83.84% identified as Seventh-day Adventists, reflecting strong engagement from the channel’s founding denomination. Another 8.08% were from other Christian denominations, suggesting a modest degree of cross-denominational appeal. Smaller numbers of viewers from non-Christian backgrounds were also recorded, including 16 Buddhists—most of whom were from the Thai group—along with five Muslims, two Hindus, and six atheists. Although these groups make up a small proportion of the total sample, their presence indicates that the channel’s content reaches beyond a purely Christian audience.

Country of Residence

The geographic distribution of Hope Channel Southeast Asia viewers showed that the majority, 50.97%, were based in Thailand, followed by 27.04% from Malaysia. Smaller groups of respondents were from the Philippines and Cambodia (3.34% each) and Singapore (1.11%). These results highlighted the fact that Thailand and Malaysia were the channel's strongest markets, while the presence of viewers from neighboring countries indicated a growing regional reach and influence beyond the core language groups.

Viewing Habits

Frequency of Watching Programs

Table 4 below shows how often viewers from all three language groups watched Hope Channel Southeast Asia programs.

Table 4 Viewers' Frequency of Watching for All Language Programs (n=359)

	Daily	%	Weekly	%	Monthly	%	< Once/Month	%	Totals
English	66	45.52	19	13.10	22	15.17	38	26.21	145
Malay	12	10.62	24	21.24	39	34.51	38	33.63	113
Thai	34	33.66	45	44.56	13	12.87	9	8.91	101
Total	112	31.20	88	24.51	74	20.61	85	23.68	359

The viewing frequency analysis of Hope Channel Southeast Asia showed distinct patterns by language group. In the English group, 45.52% of respondents watched daily, likely driven by the consistent release of short-form reels suited to mobile viewing habits. Meanwhile, the Malays showed a mixed trend, with 34.51% watching monthly, and 33.63% less than monthly. The Thais demonstrated higher levels of weekly engagement, with 44.56% watching every week, suggesting a scheduled viewing pattern.

Platforms Used to View Hope Channel Content

The survey results indicated that most viewers accessed Hope Channel content primarily through social media platforms, with Facebook and Instagram being the most popular, followed by YouTube. This trend is likely due to a lack of TV live streaming and delays in updating the Hope website and mobile application, which has resulted in relatively fewer viewers engaging through those platforms. As a result, the audience predominantly consisted of younger individuals who are more adept at using digital devices and viewing content on the Internet. Conversely, older audiences who may not be as familiar with these technologies represented a smaller portion of Hope's viewership. This digital divide highlights a significant limitation in this study, as the sample predominantly reflected younger, tech-savvy viewers, potentially skewing insights and limiting the generalizability of these findings to older demographic groups.

Research Question #2: What is the relationship between perceived program quality (Program Content, Presenter Style, Technical Quality, and Program Benefits) and viewer satisfaction?

Program Quality: English Language Programs

The study evaluated Hope Channel Southeast Asia's English programs based on 287 valid program evaluations from 145 respondents, focusing on content quality, presenter style, technical quality, and program benefits. Using a five-point Likert scale, all dimensions achieved mean scores within the "Agree/Satisfied" range; please see Table 5 for details.

Table 5 English Program Quality

<u>English Program Content Quality (Satisfaction)</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Level</u>
Program message's truth/accuracy	3.53	1.10	Satisfied
Program message's clarity	3.55	1.09	Satisfied
Program's originality and creativity	3.47	1.14	Satisfied
Program's value to me	3.43	1.11	Satisfied
Program's relevance to my life	3.49	1.17	Satisfied
<u>English Presenter Style Quality (Satisfaction)</u>			
Program presenter knowledge	3.45	1.10	Satisfied
Program presenter speaking clarity	3.46	1.11	Satisfied
Program presenter persuasiveness	3.41	1.08	Satisfied
Program presenter emotions	3.42	1.10	Satisfied
Program presenter clothing	3.45	1.18	Satisfied
<u>English Program Technical Quality (Satisfaction)</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Level</u>
Program set design	3.50	1.09	Satisfied
Program graphics quality	3.56	1.10	Satisfied
Program video quality	3.49	1.14	Satisfied
Program audio quality	3.58	1.14	Satisfied
Program music quality	3.50	1.14	Satisfied
<u>English Program Benefits to Viewers Quality (Agreement)</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Level</u>
HC programs give me hope for the present and future.	3.40	1.17	Agree
HC programs help me adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.	3.46	1.15	Agree
HC programs are helping me grow spiritually.	3.46	1.20	Agree
HC programs are helping me become a better person.	3.42	1.18	Agree
I share positive messages about HC programs with others.	3.41	1.18	Agree

Program Message's Clarity received the highest Program Content Quality satisfaction score ($M = 3.55$), while Program's Value to Me had the lowest score ($M = 3.43$) for this section, indicating opportunities for further enhancement in personal relevance. Presenter evaluations showed moderate levels of satisfaction across all aspects, with Presenter Speaking Clarity and Knowledge recording the highest score, while Persuasiveness showed potential for improvement. Technical quality also demonstrated positive feedback, with Program Graphics Quality and Audio Quality achieving relatively high mean scores, although variability suggested that there is room for consistent improvement in video and music quality. Program Benefits scores were satisfactory, particularly in encouraging healthy lifestyles and spiritual growth, though hopefulness and personal transformation could be strengthened. Willingness to share positive content also showed a moderate level of agreement. Overall, the English-speaking viewers expressed general satisfaction, but they also identified areas for creative and technical refinement.

Program Quality: Malay Language Programs

The Malay survey gathered 223 valid program evaluations from 113 respondents, assessing content quality, presenter style, technical quality, and program benefits. Program content quality was rated moderately positive, with Program Message's Truth/Accuracy and Relevance to My Life both scoring 3.45, and clarity at 3.41, indicating that while viewers generally agreed with the content quality, there remains room for improvement in clarity and perceived relevance. Originality and Creativity scored slightly lower ($M = 3.34$), suggesting the need for more engaging and innovative approaches.

Presenter style evaluations were similarly positive, with Presenter Clothing receiving the highest score ($M = 3.56$) and Presenter Persuasiveness rated the lowest ($M = 3.42$). While overall satisfaction was achieved, consistent variability indicated opportunities to strengthen emotional engagement and delivery clarity. Technical quality assessment was fairly strong, particularly for set design and video

quality (both $M = 3.51$), though variability in video satisfaction suggests room for standardization. Audio and graphics received slightly lower scores but still fell within the satisfied range.

Regarding Program Benefits, the highest-rated aspect was viewers' perception of becoming better individuals ($M = 3.54$), followed by sharing positive messages ($M = 3.48$). Although promoting hope and healthy lifestyles were also rated positively, spiritual growth showed the lowest satisfaction score ($M = 3.37$), suggesting a need to deepen and enhance the channel's spiritual content. Overall, while the Malay-speaking viewers expressed general satisfaction, strengthening the creativity, spiritual engagement, and emotional depth of the programming could further improve audience loyalty and impact.

Program Quality: Thai Language Programs

A separate dataset from the Thai-speaking group included 202 evaluations from 101 respondents, providing further insight into regional satisfaction patterns, assessing content quality, presenter style, technical quality, and program benefits. Across content dimensions, satisfaction levels generally fell within the "Somewhat Satisfied" range. Program Message's Truth/Accuracy and Clarity both scored 3.33, reflecting moderate satisfaction, but also notable variability, suggesting the need for clearer and more credible messaging. Originality and Creativity ($M = 3.36$) and Program's Relevance to My Life ($M = 3.33$) indicated areas for improvement, particularly through enhanced localization and creative engagement.

Presenter evaluations showed similar patterns, with Speaking Clarity ($M = 3.29$) and Persuasiveness ($M = 3.36$) needing improvement, while Presenter Clothing ($M = 3.42$) was rated highest. Technical quality scores for set design, graphics, video, and audio remained moderate, with the strongest area being program music ($M = 3.35$). Viewer benefits such as promoting hope, healthy living, and spiritual growth were positively rated but with high variability, indicating uneven perceptions of program impact. Compared to the English group, the Thai group's satisfaction was slightly lower across all areas, suggesting greater opportunities for improving content clarity, emotional engagement, and cultural relevance.

Research Question #3: How could Hope Channel Southeast Asia improve its program quality to attract and retain more viewers?

Suggested Topics

Viewer suggestions for future Hope Channel Southeast Asia programs revealed clear topic preferences across language groups. For the English group, Health (10.43%), Family (6.75%), and Bible-based messages (6.54%) emerged as top interests, alongside Interpersonal Relationships and Gardening. This indicated a strong desire for wellness, family-oriented, spiritual, and lifestyle content.

For the Malay group, Family, Health, and Bible-based messages each garnered 9.39% of responses, highlighting the importance of holistic well-being. Resource Management (7.94%) and End-time Events (7.22%) were also significant, suggesting interest in practical life management and prophetic or eschatological themes.

Among Thai viewers, the focus was heavily on spiritual and recovery-related topics. Bible-based messages were most requested (11.14%), followed by Addiction Recovery, Drugs, Gambling, and Pornography, each receiving 8.02%. The strong emphasis on addiction recovery may reflect societal concerns in Thailand, particularly following the proposed legalization of cannabis, underscoring the need for content addressing personal struggles and spiritual healing.

Overall, across all groups, viewers sought a blend of spiritual guidance, personal development, family strength, and practical advice. Tailoring future programs to these preferences could greatly enhance viewer engagement, relevance, and satisfaction across the diverse Southeast Asian audience.

Willingness to Share

The analysis of viewer willingness to share Hope Channel content revealed mixed results across the English, Malay, and Thai groups. In the English group, 47.59% were not willing to share, while 28.97% were very willing. The Malay group reflected a more balanced response, with 40.71% being unwilling and 30.09% being very willing to share. Thai viewers showed a 50.50% unwillingness, and only 19.80% were very willing, indicating a need for stronger engagement strategies. Across all groups, suggestions included enhancing content shareability, leveraging enthusiastic viewers, and developing content that encourages community building and resonates more strongly with audience preferences.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The demographic analysis revealed that most Hope Channel Southeast Asia viewers are based in Thailand (50.97%) and Malaysia (27.04%), with a majority identifying as Seventh-day Adventists (83.88%). Daily viewing habits were strongest among English-speaking viewers, likely due to the daily release of short form reels across social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

Viewer satisfaction was positively linked to program quality across all groups. Content quality, presenter style, technical quality, and program benefits mostly fell into the “Agree/Satisfied” range. High satisfaction with clarity and presenter knowledge was noted, while technical aspects like video quality and persuasiveness showed room for improvement.

To improve engagement, Hope Channel should refine video production, enhance presenter training, and focus content on Bible-based teachings, addiction recovery, health, and practical life skills. Short, emotionally resonant content formats, such as reels, could further increase daily engagement.

Regarding the hypothesis, the results strongly supported the alternative hypothesis (H_{1A}): a significant positive relationship exists between program quality and viewer satisfaction. Mean scores across all quality dimensions exceeded 3.41, allowing rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{10}). This affirmed that higher perceived quality correlated strongly with greater viewer satisfaction across all language groups.

Discussion

The results of this study hold important implications for understanding media engagement within Christian broadcasting in Southeast Asia. Notably, the study highlighted that Hope Channel Southeast Asia effectively reaches a younger and middle-aged demographic, aligning with recent findings on Christian media consumption in the region. AsiaOne (2023) and Magnite (2023) both observed that younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, are leading the shift to mobile and streaming platforms for spiritual and entertainment content. This trend is echoed in the current research through the strong daily engagement observed among English-speaking viewers via short-form video content.

Viewer satisfaction was found to correlate strongly with perceived program quality, consistent with the theoretical expectations outlined in the Uses and Gratifications framework and Social Exchange perspective, which continue to be applied in current digital media research (Martinez et al., 2023; Adventist Research, 2024). As with recent studies of media engagement, clarity of presentation, content authenticity, and professional production quality were identified as essential for sustaining audience satisfaction. However, this study’s findings diverged slightly in noting that technical weaknesses—such as inconsistencies in video quality and delivery—still meaningfully impacted viewer satisfaction. This suggests that audiences in Southeast Asia may have rising expectations for professional standards in faith-based content, paralleling broader regional preferences for professionally produced videos over user-generated content (AVIA, 2025).

The pattern of content topic preferences underscored an important regional and cultural dimension not heavily emphasized in prior Western-focused studies. While health, family, and Bible-based teachings were universally valued—like global Christian media trends—Thai viewers’ strong emphasis on addiction recovery content reflects culturally specific concerns. This aligns with Symons (2024), who highlighted the broader national debate in Thailand following the proposed legalization

of cannabis, illustrating how social and policy changes can shape spiritual content needs in distinct cultural settings.

The willingness to share Hope Channel content, while present, suggests a potential area for growth. Unlike findings from recent marketing and social media research that highlight strong sharing behaviors when emotional resonance and community identity are high (NetInfluencer, 2025; Violot et al., 2024), a more cautious sharing tendency was seen, particularly among Malay and Thai audiences. This indicates that deeper emphasis on emotional storytelling, community belonging, and culturally sensitive outreach strategies may be needed to strengthen peer-to-peer distribution of Christian content in the region.

The significance of this study lies not only in its affirmation of established theories of media engagement, but also in extending them by providing culturally contextualized insights. While much of the existing research on Christian media has examined Western audiences, this study emphasized the importance of regional specificity, cultural sensitivity, and differentiated digital strategies. It highlights the growing importance of mobile-first engagement, the strategic value of short-form content, and the necessity of addressing real-world social issues such as health, addiction, and family challenges through faith-based programming.

This study contributes to the body of Christian media research by introducing regional, cultural, and technological nuances often absent from prior analyses. It provides both confirmation of universal engagement principles and practical, context-specific strategies for Hope Channel Southeast Asia and similar media ministries seeking to strengthen their outreach in the digital era. The findings underscore the need for tailored content that addresses localized concerns, leverages emotional and authentic storytelling, and maintains professional production standards as critical drivers of audience satisfaction and sharing.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the demographic characteristics, viewing habits, and relationships between program quality and viewer satisfaction for Hope Channel Southeast Asia. Through a wide-ranging survey across English, Malay, and Thai-speaking audiences, the findings revealed that most viewers were young to middle-aged adults, with Thailand and Malaysia representing the strongest geographical bases. Viewer satisfaction was closely linked to the quality of content, presenter style, technical execution, and perceived program benefits. Across all language groups, dimensions such as content clarity and presenter knowledge were consistently associated with higher satisfaction levels, while areas like video quality and presenter persuasiveness indicated opportunities for further improvement. In addition, audience topic preferences showed strong interest in Bible-based messages, health, family life, and recovery-related content, particularly among Thai viewers. The study also confirmed the alternative hypothesis (H_{1A}), demonstrating a significant positive relationship between program quality and viewer satisfaction. Overall, the results provide important insights for strategic programming and audience engagement, highlighting the need for culturally tailored, emotionally resonant, and technically refined content to enhance Hope Channel Southeast Asia's future impact.

Recommendations/Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the current understanding of viewer engagement within Christian media in Southeast Asia, particularly in highlighting the importance of age, content format, and cultural relevance. Based on the results, several recommendations can be made to refine and strengthen Hope Channel Southeast Asia's programming strategies for English, Malay, and Thai audiences.

For the English-speaking group, expanding the production of short-form content, such as reels and YouTube Shorts, is essential to maintain high levels of daily engagement. Emphasizing mobile-friendly, spiritually enriching, and practical life-application themes would further deepen viewer loyalty. Enhancing presenter persuasiveness and technical quality, particularly in video sharpness and audio clarity, should also be prioritized to improve the overall viewing experience.

Among the Malay-speaking group, the focus should be on diversifying program formats, including more interactive elements such as panel discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and culturally contextual storytelling. Increasing spiritual depth and offering practical lifestyle guidance aligned with health, personal growth, and resilience could significantly enhance engagement.

The Thai-speaking group's lower satisfaction levels suggest an urgent need for culturally tailored content, particularly addressing issues of addiction recovery, mental health, and spiritual growth. Integrating localized testimonies, recovery-focused storytelling, and youth-targeted content could also resonate more deeply with this audience. Improving presenter speaking clarity and emotional authenticity is crucial for strengthening viewer connection and trust.

Overall, tailoring content strategies to each audience's cultural and spiritual needs, improving technical and emotional delivery standards, and investing in youth-oriented and mobile-first programming are vital. Such targeted efforts may not only sustain Hope Channel Southeast Asia's current reach, but also drive deeper, long-term impact across its diverse regional audiences.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

While this study provides valuable insights into the viewership patterns and satisfaction levels of Hope Channel Southeast Asia audiences, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted predominantly of Seventh-day Adventist respondents (83.88%), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader Christian audiences or interfaith viewers. The religious homogeneity could bias satisfaction trends and content preferences toward Adventist-specific expectations, rather than representing a wider spectrum of Southeast Asian religious demographics.

Additionally, the study employed a convenience sampling method through online surveys, primarily targeting active social media followers. This may have resulted in an overrepresentation of more digitally engaged viewers, while underrepresenting less active or offline audiences. As such, the findings may not fully capture the views of infrequent viewers or individuals who engage with Hope Channel through traditional television or offline platforms.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which can be subject to response bias, such as social desirability or selective memory. The cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to draw conclusions about causal relationships between program quality improvements and changes in viewer satisfaction over time.

Future research could address these limitations by employing stratified random sampling methods to include a broader and more diverse audience base across different religious, age, and technological backgrounds. Conducting longitudinal studies would allow researchers to observe changes in satisfaction and engagement over time, particularly as new programming strategies are implemented. Moreover, future studies could adopt a program-based evaluation model, asking respondents to evaluate specific programs, rather than self-selecting their favorites. This approach would provide more standardized, comparable data across different types of content. Finally, qualitative research methods, such as focus groups or interviews, could complement survey data, offering deeper insights into the emotional and cultural factors influencing viewer satisfaction and content sharing behavior.

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Religious Ideology Trends in the Eyes of the New Generation: Conflict, Reinterpretation, and Faith-Based Discrimination

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study aimed to explore how younger generations interpret, negotiate, and critique religious ideologies in contemporary society. It focused on three core dimensions: (1) ideological conflict between traditional religious teachings and modern values, (2) reinterpretation of religious beliefs within the context of digital culture and individual autonomy, and (3) experiences of faith-based discrimination, particularly as they relate to gender, sexuality, and non-religious identities. The research responds to a global phenomenon in which religious affiliation is declining, yet moral and spiritual inquiries persist in new and complex forms.

Introduction/Background: Religious ideology has long provided frameworks for explaining life's existential questions, shaping moral behavior, and structuring social order. However, in an era marked by globalization, secularization, digital communication, and identity pluralism, the authority of traditional religious institutions has been increasingly challenged. Younger generations—particularly Gen Z and Millennials—are no longer passive recipients of inherited religious beliefs. Rather, they critically assess and selectively engage with religious teachings. This study, situated in the culturally diverse Nakhon Sri Burin region of Thailand (comprising Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram, Surin, and Sisaket Provinces), investigated this paradigm shift through the lens of sociology of religion, drawing on theories by Berger, Althusser, and Foucault. Religion is framed as both a system of meaning-making and a power-laden ideological apparatus whose role in modern life is undergoing reconfiguration.

Methodology: The research employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of younger individuals across diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. Purposive sampling was used to select 100 participants, classified into four groups: religious leaders (20), young religious adherents (40), non-religious youth (30), and scholars of religion (10). Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observation of religious practices across Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic communities. Thematic content analysis and pattern analysis were employed to identify recurring interpretations, critiques, and reconfigurations of religious ideology. Documentary research and secondary data supported the empirical findings by offering a broader theoretical and sociocultural context.

Findings: Three major findings emerged. **Ideological Conflict and Selective Belief:** Many young people perceive traditional religious ideologies as incompatible with contemporary ideals of equality, individual rights, and scientific reasoning. This has resulted in the rejection of certain doctrinal elements (e.g., gender hierarchy, moral absolutism) while retaining or reinterpreting others (e.g., compassion, forgiveness, mindfulness). This phenomenon aligns with the concept of “believing without belonging,” where individuals maintain spiritual values outside institutional frameworks.

Reinterpretation of Religion through Digital Culture: The digital era has facilitated new forms of religious engagement. Participants reported accessing religious content through platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and podcasts, often bypassing traditional religious authorities. This has fostered the rise of personalized religiosity, syncretism, and hybrid spiritual practices. Religious meaning is now negotiated interactively, informally, and with critical distance from clerical control. **Faith-Based Discrimination and Calls for Reform:** Discriminatory experiences—particularly among LGBTQ+ youth,

women, and non-religious individuals—highlight the exclusionary tendencies of some religious institutions. Many participants voiced a desire for religious reform that prioritizes inclusivity, compassion, and ethical integrity over rigid adherence to outdated dogmas. These critiques do not signal rejection of religion per se but demand a morally relevant and socially just reinterpretation.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This research contributes to the understanding of how young people actively transform religious ideology in ways that affirm human dignity, pluralism, and autonomy. It underscores the erosion of institutional monopoly over spiritual meaning and highlights the creative capacity of youth to construct alternative ethical frameworks. By revealing how religion functions as both a site of oppression and liberation, the study enriches sociological debates on religion, identity, and generational change. Practically, the findings can inform religious institutions, educators, and policymakers seeking to engage youth in inclusive and constructive ways. It also offers pathways to address intergenerational tensions, religious intolerance, and ideological polarization.

Recommendations: ***For Religious Institutions:*** Create inclusive spaces that welcome critical dialogue, affirm diverse identities, and decenter hierarchical authority. Religious leaders should receive training in interfaith sensitivity, gender inclusion, and youth engagement. ***For Educators:*** Incorporate religious literacy into educational curricula with an emphasis on critical thinking, pluralism, and comparative belief systems to equip students for life in a multi-faith, secular world. ***For Policymakers:*** Enact laws that protect freedom of religion and belief, especially for minority faith groups and non-religious individuals. Public institutions should ensure that no citizen is disadvantaged due to their religious identity or lack thereof.

Research Limitation: The study is geographically limited to the Nakhon Sri Burin region in Thailand and thus may not fully capture the diversity of religious experience in other parts of the country or in different cultural contexts. The qualitative nature of the research, while rich in depth, does not allow for generalizability to larger populations. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce potential biases linked to social desirability or selective memory.

Future Research: Further studies could expand the geographic scope or employ mixed methods approaches to compare generational religious perspectives across regions and belief systems. Future research should explore long-term implications of religious deinstitutionalization on civic engagement, moral development, and social cohesion. Investigating how digital religion influences political behavior, social activism, and community formation among youth may also yield valuable insights.

Keywords: *Religious ideology, youth, secularism, reinterpretation, faith-based discrimination*

Introduction

Religious ideology is a structured system of belief that provides explanatory frameworks for fundamental aspects of human existence, including the meaning of life, suffering, death, morality, and natural phenomena such as birth, aging, illness, and disasters. Many religious traditions interpret these events as consequences of karmic forces or the intentions of divine or sacred entities—such as God, Dharma, or universal laws. Religion functions as a mechanism for establishing social values and regulating individual and collective behavior. This is typically mediated through institutional structures and forms of authority, including doctrinal teachings, moral prescriptions, sacred rituals, and the formal roles of clergy (Alagha, 2006). However, in rapidly evolving social contexts—especially among younger generations such as Generation Z and Generation Y—religious ideology has increasingly come under scrutiny. In the age of globalization, digital media, and heightened individualism, traditional religious frameworks are being reinterpreted or questioned, reflecting a shift in how sacred meaning and moral order are constructed and negotiated.

According to global statistics, the number of people identifying as non-religious increased dramatically from 35 million in 2008 to approximately 1.1 billion in 2019, with projections indicating continued growth. This shift is particularly pronounced among individuals under the age of 40, who constitute most of the non-religious demographic across all global regions. Notably, five of the top ten

countries with the highest proportions of non-religious populations are in Asia: China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, and Vietnam.

In Thailand—traditionally regarded as a strongly Buddhist nation—recent statistics show that 20% of the population now identifies as non-religious (Kamnoetsiri, 2022). This is a remarkable shift in a society where religion has long been intertwined with national identity, monarchy, and community life. There is disillusionment with religious institutions, revealed in reports of misconduct, corruption, or perceived hypocrisy among religious leaders, which weakens public trust. Digital media influence through online platforms amplifies criticism and highlights scandals more widely than traditional media ever could. Young people consume digital content that often questions or satirizes religious authority. Changing lifestyles and values, urbanization, higher education, and exposure to global culture foster more individualistic orientations, causing spirituality to be pursued outside of traditional temples and monasteries. A contributing factor appears to be growing disillusionment with religious figures and institutions—particularly as negative perceptions are amplified in online and digital media—which, in turn, undermines reverence toward faith-based traditions (Kamnoetsiri, 2022).

Simultaneously, the phenomenon of religious disaffiliation is increasingly understood as a complex interplay of emotions, beliefs, cognition, and the assertion of individual liberty. The choice to forgo religion is, in this sense, an expression of personal rights and freedoms, rooted in the principle that religious belief must remain a matter of individual autonomy. As such, the rising tide of non-religiosity presents a significant challenge to religious institutions, particularly in their ability to articulate and embody genuine moral values. As Venerable Naphit Yanaviro (Lap Imthong) argues, the legitimacy of religion can no longer rest solely on doctrinal preaching; rather, it must be substantiated through demonstrable ethical integrity and lived moral experience. The expression of religious affiliation should not be confined to bureaucratic documents or official records but must instead be reflected in personal virtue and social relevance (Yanaviro, 2021).

Consequently, a growing number of younger individuals are opting to disengage from formal religious institutions—a phenomenon often described as the deinstitutionalization of religion. Instead of participating in traditional religious practices, many engage with religion through self-directed learning and private spiritual practice. Examples include meditating or observing Buddhist precepts at home rather than attending temple services, as well as embracing practices such as yoga, mindfulness, or secular forms of contemplative discipline (Kaeuper, 2012). This shift reflects a move away from ritualized, institutionalized expressions of faith toward more personalized, eclectic spiritualities.

Concurrently, there has been a noticeable trend toward syncretism, in which elements of Buddhist belief are combined with alternative spiritual systems such as belief in cosmic energy, astrology, or Tarot. This pattern highlights a generational divergence in religious orientation: while older generations often rely on religion as the primary framework for determining moral judgments—such as what is considered "right" or "wrong"—younger individuals tend to adopt a more selective approach to belief. Rather than adhering wholesale to religious orthodoxy, they often engage in partial belief, embracing certain teachings while disregarding others (Possamai, 2016). This can manifest in practices such as forgoing temple attendance, declining monastic ordination, or critically questioning the authority and social role of the clergy.

The reinterpretation of religion among younger generations does not signify an abandonment of religion, but rather the creation of personalized forms of religiosity. Examples include meditation without the presence of monks, prayer through digital applications, or reverence for nature without reference to a deity. Others choose to retain religion primarily as a cultural practice—for instance, participating in merit-making festivals—while distancing themselves from theological doctrines. Peter Berger, the Austrian American sociologist, has argued that in the postmodern era, religion has increasingly become a "commodity in the marketplace of belief." No longer regarded as the absolute truth or the sole path to transcendence, religion now constitutes just one among many options available for individual "consumption" within a free marketplace. Unlike in the past, religion no longer monopolizes social life; instead, it must compete with other religions, secular ideologies, scientific explanations, and cultural trends. In this context, individuals choose whether to affiliate with a

religion, not because they are predetermined by family or state, but based on pragmatic considerations, personal sentiments, or identity alignment. Belief, therefore, becomes “optional,” and individuals emerge as “faith consumers” (Martin, 2013).

Given the preceding analysis, it is evident that in a rapidly transforming postmodern world—marked by accelerated changes in technology, values, and social structures—religious ideology, once central to regulating human behavior, is facing profound challenges. The decline in religious authority among younger generations is not solely attributable to the process of secularization. It also stems from ideological tensions and growing critiques of the structural power exercised by religion, particularly in its exclusionary practices toward marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with non-conforming beliefs (Jolliffe & Foster, 2022).

Based on the foregoing considerations, the researchers observed that in today’s rapidly changing postmodern world—shaped by transformations in technology, social structures, and values—religious ideology, once central to regulating human behavior, is increasingly confronted with resistance from younger generations. The decline in religious adherence cannot be attributed solely to this secularization process; it also emerges from ideological conflicts and critical questions regarding the structural power that religion wields over marginalized groups, including women, LGBTQ+ communities, and those of differing faiths. In this sense, religious ideology, as viewed by younger generations, exists in a state of critique and negotiation rather than unquestioned belief. Young people do not reject religion because of a lack of faith, but because they refuse to accept religion as an instrument of suppression, exclusion, or inequality. Instead, they seek new interpretations that render religion contemporarily meaningful—anchored in compassion and openness—transforming it into a space of freedom and inclusion for all, irrespective of identity or belief.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, focusing on an in-depth analysis of religious ideology from the perspective of younger generations, with particular attention to conflict, reinterpretation, and faith-based discrimination. A phenomenological approach was adopted to capture and interpret the lived experiences of individuals directly engaged in these phenomena. To analyze the data, content analysis and pattern analysis were applied as methodological tools to uncover underlying themes and structures in the ways younger generations understand religious ideology. The field site encompassed the Nakhon Sri Burin sub-region, specifically the provinces of Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram, Surin, and Sisaket. Data were collected through multiple methods, including in-depth individual interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The details of these methods are as follows.

1. Secondary Sources: The collection of secondary data was conducted through documentary research, focusing on texts and studies relevant to religious ideology from the perspectives of younger generations. The analysis covered issues such as conflict, reinterpretation, and faith-based discrimination across Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Specific areas of investigation included: Young people’s views on religious doctrines, the Perceived significance of religion, Patterns of belief and faith, Adaptations of rituals and religious practices, the Relationship between religion and conflict in modern society, Perspectives on teachings concerning gender, sexuality, and gender roles, and the Study of religion through modern technologies and relevant scholarly research.

2. Primary Sources: The primary data consisted of information concerning religious ideology from the perspectives of younger generations, with a focus on conflict, reinterpretation, and faith-based discrimination. Data collection was carried out through the following methods:

a. In-Depth Interviews: The in-depth interview method was employed using a semi-structured interview guide to elicit detailed insights into young people’s perspectives on Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. The interviews addressed multiple thematic areas, including religious belief and personal experiences, ideological reinterpretations and individual meaning-making, modes of communication and the use of digital or traditional platforms, public expressions of faith and visibility of religious

identity, and critical questioning of religious norms and authority. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding how young individuals engage with religion in public spaces and how they negotiate religious values within the context of contemporary social life. The interviews also investigated participants' perceptions of the relevance of religion, varying degrees of belief and faith commitment, as well as changes in ritual practices and methods of observance.

b. Focus Group Discussions: Focus group discussions were conducted to explore collective perspectives and stimulate interactive dialogue among participants regarding Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. The discussions centered on how young people understand and engage with religious beliefs, communicate their views, and express religious or critical sentiments in public spaces. Key areas of inquiry included emerging reinterpretations of religious doctrine, contestations of traditional teachings, the use of humor or satire as a form of religious critique, and activism related to freedom and rights that may conflict with established religious norms. Each focus group consisted of 6 to 8 participants, selected to represent diverse experiences and viewpoints. These sessions allowed for the observation of group dynamics, the negotiation of meaning, and generational differences in religious interpretation and expression.

c. Non-participant Observation was employed to examine young people's engagement with a variety of religious rituals and practices across Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. The observations included participation in and observation of events such as Buddhist merit-making ceremonies, prayer gatherings, and ordination rituals; Christian Mass, sacraments, prayer, and scripture reading; as well as Islamic practices of Salat (daily prayers), Sawm (fasting), and Zakat (almsgiving). This method allowed the researchers to document how religious practices were performed, how participants interacted within these contexts, and how ritual activities were reinterpreted or adapted in contemporary social settings.

Research Target Group

For the selection of participants, the study employed purposive sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved as key informants who could provide substantive insights into religious ideology from the perspective of younger generations—particularly regarding conflict, reinterpretation, and faith-based discrimination. A total of approximately 100 participants were engaged in the study, categorized into four distinct groups as follows.

1. Religious Leaders (20 participants): Including Buddhist monks, Christian clergy, and Islamic imams, this group offers institutional perspectives on doctrinal teachings, religious authority, and the organization of faith-based activities both offline and online. They served as key informants due to their doctrinal knowledge and leadership roles.

2. Young Religious Adherents (40 participants): Comprising youth who identify with Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam, this group helps reveal tensions between traditional religious values and contemporary societal norms. Focus areas included reinterpretation of doctrine, resistance to clerical authority, and experiences of belief-based discrimination.

3. Non-religious Youth (30 participants): These participants did not affiliate with any formal religion. The study explored how they construct moral frameworks, personal meaning, and identity in secular contexts where rationality and autonomy are prioritized over traditional religiosity.

4. Scholars of Religion (10 participants): Academic experts in religious studies contributed interpretive analyses on the broader ideological shifts, such as the decline of institutional authority, redefinition of belief, and the evolving cultural role of religion in modern society.

Results and Discussion

In the past, the northeastern region of Thailand was predominantly an agricultural society, where communities maintained close ties with temples and monks. Merit-making, traditional festivals, and

religious rituals were regarded as the central elements of daily life. However, with the onset of economic development, urban expansion, labor migration, and increasing access to education and modern media, the communal relationship with temples has gradually weakened. Many young people have moved to Bangkok or other major cities for work and study, resulting in a diminished role for religion in everyday life. However, this does not necessarily signify a complete rejection of religion. Instead, many young people choose to maintain a certain distance from it. For example, they may not visit temples regularly but still participate in merit-making festivals as community events. Others turn to new forms of spiritual practice, such as meditation, prayer applications, or psychological interpretations of Buddhist teachings. For some, religion serves primarily as a cultural marker rather than a theological commitment—manifested in participation in ordination ceremonies, funerals, or traditional festivals such as the Bun Bang Fai (Rocket Festival)—while detaching themselves from doctrinal or theological content.

This study investigated how younger generations reinterpret and transform religious ideology in the context of globalization, digitalization, and liberal thought. Key points include:

Religion as Ideology: Rather than a fixed moral system, religion is examined as a cultural ideology embedded in institutions, norms, and power structures, drawing on Althusser's theory that ideology conditions individuals to reproduce dominant social orders.

Youth as Active Agents: Young people are not passive recipients of inherited religious systems (Ferretter, 2006). They critically challenge religious authority, reject rigid rituals, and create alternative belief structures—often expressed as being “spiritual but not religious,” engaging with online religious discourse, or forming hybrid, inclusive worldviews.

Dual Nature of Religion: Religion is seen both as a mechanism for meaning making and a tool of social control, implicated in sustaining hierarchy and exclusion, especially regarding normative values.

Analytical Focus: This study provides a critical framework to analyze how youth negotiate, subvert, and reimagine religious ideology, prioritizing autonomy, diversity, and subjective meaning over institutional conformity.

However, younger generations are not simply passive recipients of religious ideology. Rather, they are active agents who critically interrogate, resist, and reconfigure the structures of religious authority. Many reject traditional rituals and institutional affiliations, instead cultivating new spaces of belief that align with their personal identities and values. This includes identifying as spiritual but not religious, engaging with religious ideas through online communities, or developing hybrid forms of belief that are inclusive and liberatory in nature. This research, therefore, goes beyond merely documenting generational shifts in religious adherence. It offers a critical framework for analyzing religious ideology as a tool of power, and explores how younger individuals negotiate, subvert, and reimagine belief systems in ways that affirm autonomy, plurality, and meaning on their own terms.

The Transformation of Religious Thought Among Younger Generations

In an era of rapid technological advancement and globalization, significant changes have emerged in how younger generations relate to religion. Increasingly, they show less interest in adhering strictly to religious doctrines or rituals but instead exhibit a growing tendency toward individualized religiosity. In this context, religion is no longer perceived as a rigid system of belief imposed through ceremonial and institutional authority. Rather, it becomes a spiritual space—flexible, optional, and subject to personal interpretation and meaning-making. This transformation can be understood through the theoretical lens of sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. Giddens (2013) conceptualizes the modern era as one marked by detraditionalization—the erosion of traditional religious practices and structures, including increased secularism, atheism, and religious disaffiliation. Beck (2001) extends this analysis by describing contemporary society as a phase of reflexive modernization, wherein individuals actively evaluate, select, or reject belief systems according to their own reasoning, experiences, and identities. In this framework, young people are no longer passive

inheritors of religious tradition, but are reflexive agents who negotiate religious meaning within pluralistic, digital, and globalized contexts. Thus, religion is increasingly untethered from institutional authority and redefined through personal autonomy, fluid spirituality, and selective engagement.

Many members of the younger generation do not reject religion outright. Instead, they tend to diminish its institutional authority, while elevating its role as a source of emotional and psychological healing. This shift is evident in the selective adoption of religious practices—such as meditation detached from monastic authority, or the integration of certain moral teachings into daily life without the need for formal rituals like ordination, chanting, or temple attendance. This phenomenon aligns with what sociologists term “believing without belonging”—a condition in which individuals retain spiritual beliefs without affiliating with formal religious institutions. Religious identity, in this context, becomes increasingly fluid, marked by religious syncretism and shaped by access to digital platforms that enable autonomous exploration and reinterpretation (Smith & Adamczyk, 2020).

Trends among younger cohorts further suggest that religion is no longer understood as a closed doctrinal system, but rather as an open system that allows for integration and hybridity. For instance, an individual may live by Buddhist principles of mindfulness, while drawing on Christian ideas of forgiveness or incorporating teachings from positive psychology (Klangrit et al., 2024). This trans-religious search for meaning reflects an eclectic approach that is largely self-directed and digitally mediated (Keshavan et al., 2013). Foucault (2019) emphasized that religion is not a neutral entity, but rather a form of discourse, produced and regulated through systems of power. Accordingly, Islam cannot be reduced to a single, unified meaning. When younger Muslim generations advocate for interpretations such as “liberal Islam” or “Islamic feminism,” this does not represent a destruction of religion, but instead the creation of a new discursive arena—one that challenges both ecclesiastical authority and authoritarian state power. From this perspective, the reinterpretation of religion is deeply intertwined with questions of knowledge, power, and freedom (Macey, 2019).

Shifting Perspectives on Buddhism among Younger Generations

In the current era of societal transformation, Buddhism—once the foundational structure of moral and ethical values in Thai society—is undergoing a process of reinterpretation, particularly by younger generations. These individuals increasingly question their religion’s role, legitimacy, and practices. This shift is not a matter of declining faith or religious disengagement; rather, it reflects an ideological and practical reconfiguration of Buddhist observance to align with modern contexts (Wuthnow, 2007). Economic development, expanded access to education, and advances in technology have all added to a broader transformation in value systems and belief structures. Younger individuals, raised in a globalized world that emphasizes freedom, individualism, and critical inquiry, are more inclined to question the authority of religion as a foundational pillar of social order (Bengtson et al., 2013).

In this regard, religion is no longer accepted as a neutral force for moral guidance, but rather as a discourse that constructs and regulates power. As Foucault (2019) has noted, religion is not merely a belief system, but a discourse of power—one that governs bodies, thoughts, and behaviors (Cataldi, 2004). Many young people perceive religion, particularly institutionalized Buddhism, as a tool of the state used to impose ethical norms and reinforce political control. In this framework, religion functions as an Ideological State Apparatus—a concept introduced by Althusser—legitimizing systems of authority, such as obedience to elders, patriarchal norms, and the subordination of women. As a result, younger individuals, particularly those influenced by liberal and feminist ideologies, tend to resist or critically engage with the institutional and ideological functions of religion. They are not simply disengaging from Buddhism but actively participating in its critique and reconstruction in ways that reflect their values, aspirations, and demands for equality and autonomy.

Interview Excerpt: Buddhist Youth, Age 21

To be honest, I feel that religion is becoming increasingly distant from our everyday lives. Unlike our parents’ generation, we didn’t grow up listening to sermons from monks. Instead, we learn through platforms like TikTok and YouTube. The Dhamma we consume is short, concise, and meaningful in ways that relate to our own lived experiences. Young people today tend to believe based on reason rather

than blind faith. Our grandparents used to tell us to go to the temple and listen to sermons, but it just doesn't resonate anymore. The temple has become a place of rituals rather than a space for open dialogue or critical discussion about the Dhamma—like it was during the Buddha's time. It feels like people just listen and believe without reflection, and sometimes what is said isn't even grounded in the core teachings of Buddhism. I think monks need to create more space for young people to speak, to listen to criticism, and to allow religion to evolve with society. We don't need strict religiosity; we need a safe space to understand ourselves—through religion, but in our own way.

Shifting Perspectives on Christianity Among Younger Generations

The rise of scientific knowledge, the global human rights movement, and the evolving behaviors and values of younger generations have significantly impacted traditional Christian belief systems. Today's youth are not merely “distancing themselves from religion,” but actively reinterpreting Christianity to align with their lived experiences, liberal values, and resistance to long-standing conservative power structures. This transformation is better captured by the concept of New Secularism, which differs from classical notions of secularization. Rather than rejecting religion outright, younger individuals selectively engage with aspects of Christianity—such as love, hope, and forgiveness—while discarding institutional rituals, religious authorities, or doctrines that no longer resonate in a contemporary context (McKenzie et al., 2019).

Interview Excerpt: Christian Youth, Age 18

I love God and grew up in the church, but ever since I realized I'm gay, I've started to feel unwelcome. When news spread in the congregation, some people stopped talking to me—even though I'm still the same person, just more honest with myself. That experience led me to search for answers directly from the Bible, and I found that Jesus never taught us to hate anyone. So, I've chosen to be a Christian in my own way. Even if the church doesn't accept me, I believe that God does.

Shifting Perspectives on Islam Among Younger Generations

Islam holds a deeply embedded position in both the personal and collective lives of Muslims, particularly in societies where it is the dominant religion. However, in the context of contemporary Northeastern Thai societies—shaped by globalization, digital transformation, and the growing influence of human rights discourse—Muslim youth are increasingly redefining what it means to be Muslim on their own terms. This redefinition is evident in the emergence of new identity frameworks such as Muslim feminists, queer Muslims, and proponents of eco-Islam, all of whom seek to integrate Islamic principles with broader issues like gender justice and environmental ethics. These perspectives reflect a deliberate effort to align faith with contemporary social concerns.

For example, some Muslim women adopt fashionable interpretations of hijab, while others make the personal ethical decision to forgo the hijab entirely—yet continue to affirm their devotion to Allah (Smith & Woodward, 2013). Such developments mark a significant departure from rigid, literalist interpretations of Islam, such as Salafism, which many young people now view as outdated and incompatible with the cultural pluralism and moral complexity of the modern world. In this view, Islam is not abandoned but reimagined—that is, reframed as a flexible, living tradition capable of responding to the diverse and evolving realities of Muslim lives in the 21st century.

Interview Excerpt: Adam (Pseudonym), Age 23

I grew up in a Muslim family in a small community where Buddhists and Christians also lived. We were raised to respect one another and coexist peacefully. As I got older, I began to question certain religious practices—such as the roles assigned to women and specific interpretations that seemed outdated. It's not that I lost faith in Islam, but I chose to embrace a more compassionate and reasoned perspective, one that aligns with the diverse society I live in. I still perform salat (prayer), but I don't judge others who don't. I believe religion isn't meant to control people, but to foster understanding and humanity.

New Interpretations of Religion and Shifting Meanings

In contemporary society, and particularly among younger generations, this reconfiguration of religion transforms it from an unquestionable authority into a dialogical space where moral reasoning

and lived experience take precedence over rigid dogma. For many young people, faith is no longer inherited passively; it is co-created, grounded in empathy, and shaped through critical engagement with both tradition and modernity. In the Nakhon Sri Burin region of Thailand—which includes the provinces of Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram, Surin, and Sisaket—religious and ethnic diversity is deeply woven into the social fabric. Among the younger Muslim population in this area, there is a growing tendency to reject the use of religious doctrine as a tool to regulate gender diversity or to restrict women's freedoms. This rejection does not imply a loss of faith, but rather a reimagining of religion—one that aligns with principles of compassion, human dignity, and coexistence within a pluralistic society. The research team proposes the following classification of new interpretations of religion and shifting meanings across three major religious traditions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—based on field data collected in the region:

New Interpretations of Buddhism and Shifting Meanings

Historically, Buddhism in Thailand has been closely associated with ritualistic practices and orthodox beliefs (orthodoxy)—such as merit-making for the next life, ritual purification, or the veneration of sacred objects. However, younger generations have increasingly begun to question whether religion should focus more on addressing the challenges of this life, rather than being preoccupied with the afterlife or karma from the past. This has led to a reorientation of Buddhism as a form of practical psychology or “Dhamma for life”—centered on mindfulness, emotional regulation, and achieving balance amidst capitalist pressures. This shift aligns with Max Weber’s theory of rationalization, which posits that in modern societies, religion moves from a domain of the sacred toward one governed by reason and pragmatism (Kalberg, 2021). For many young Buddhists, learning the Dhamma no longer depends solely on temple sermons or formal participation in rituals. Instead, they engage with Buddhist teachings through platforms like TikTok, YouTube, podcasts, or livestreams of meditation monks who translate traditional teachings into accessible language that resonates with contemporary life.

Expert Commentary: Scholar of Religion

In my view, Buddhism is being reinterpreted to align with the lifestyle and values of contemporary society—especially among younger generations. We are witnessing a shift in which Buddhism is no longer centered on rituals or rigid formalities, but rather serves as a tool for self-understanding, emotional healing, and improving one’s quality of life. For today’s youth, the meaning of religion is not about sacredness or external authority, but about internal experience and reason. They don’t believe simply because a teacher or monk says something—they want to know whether a teaching actually reduces suffering. This represents a movement away from authority-based faith toward a more reflective, reasoned form of belief.

New Interpretations of Christianity and Shifting Meanings

In the 21st century, Christianity in many countries—particularly within multicultural and globalized societies such as Thailand, the United States, and South Korea—has been significantly affected by both internal and external pressures. The institutional Church, which once held a position of privilege and moral authority, is increasingly subject to critique by younger generations. This is especially evident in debates surrounding civil rights, gender diversity, women’s roles, and interfaith coexistence. As a result, Christianity is no longer understood solely as “faith in God” but has become a “contested arena of meaning”—one negotiated across generations, ideological frameworks, and moral hierarchies (Tehrani & Lum, 2006). Many young Christians reject moral absolutism in favor of a more inclusive and relational theology—interpreting Christianity as a pathway grounded in love, empathy, and non-judgmental coexistence with others. This rethinking aligns closely with Liberation Theology and Progressive Christianity, both of which position religion as a social force for justice. Unlike traditional models that emphasize Biblical literalism and obedience to divine commands, these new interpretations engage directly with contemporary ethical concerns. These include affirming LGBTQ+ identities, dismantling patriarchal structures within the Church, and rejecting the stigmatization of women regarding issues such as sexuality and reproductive rights (Petrella, 2017).

Clerical Commentary: Christian Priest

Contemporary Christianity is being reinterpreted in response to changes in society, globalization, and modern lifestyles. Younger generations tend to prioritize spirituality over ritual. They understand God's teachings more through the lens of ethics, love, justice, and human rights rather than strict adherence to rigid doctrines or rules.

In Northeastern Thailand, although Christians constitute a religious minority, there is a clear trend toward the formation of new expressions of faith communities, particularly among younger Christians. These individuals increasingly utilize digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and podcasts to disseminate the teachings of Jesus through a lens that emphasizes non-judgment and non-dogmatic engagement. This includes the rise of inclusive churches and LGBTQ+ Christian groups that are developing new theological interpretations, often framed through the lens of Queer Theology.

New Interpretations of Islam and Shifting Meanings

As a dynamic belief system, Islam is increasingly subject to both external pressures and internal critique—more so than at any point in recent history. These changes are not limited to ritual practice or Islamic law (Shari'a) but extend deeply into the evolving meanings of what it means to be Muslim in a globalized society. In the face of contemporary realities—such as women's rights, human rights, democratic governance, religious pluralism, and technological modernity—Islam is being reinterpreted in ways that allow it to remain spiritually relevant, while also responsive to the demands of the modern world. This shift reflects the effort of Muslim communities to recontextualize Islamic principles in alignment with present-day values.

For example, contemporary re-readings of Shari'a often emphasize compatibility with human rights, and there is increasing acceptance of women's roles in public life (Gibb, 2022). What was once seen as a symbol of female subjugation—such as the wearing of the hijab—is now being reframed by younger generations as a declaration of identity and an act of autonomous choice. Within the framework of neoliberal modernity, previously stigmatized religious practices have become tools of resistance and negotiation vis-à-vis religious authority.

Clerical Commentary: Imam

New interpretations of Islam do not signify a departure from faith, but rather a return to the original spirit of the Qur'an—one rooted in mercy, justice, and peace. These reinterpretations are about applying those core principles to the realities of the modern world. We must acknowledge that society has changed, and certain practices from the past may no longer align with contemporary conditions. Therefore, interpretation today must prioritize foundational values over rigid forms. We are witnessing a greater emphasis on women's rights, increased participation of women in mosque life, respect for diverse beliefs, and peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims. These are, in fact, central to Islam, but in the past, they were often overshadowed by more rigid readings that neglected the true intent of the faith.

Belief-Based Discrimination in Contemporary Society

A growing number of younger individuals today self-identify as agnostic: that is, choosing not to commit to any single religious faith. This is not merely a personal preference, but a broader sociocultural phenomenon reflecting what may be called a “transitional state of faith identity” in an era increasingly defined by pluralistic worldviews, cultural complexity, and unbounded access to information. Historically, religion served as the primary tool for constructing a “meaning-making order”—offering normative guidance on how life should be lived, what constituted good or evil, and the ultimate purpose of human existence. However, in the contemporary context—especially under the influence of globalization, digital technologies, and modern scientific reasoning—religion is no longer perceived as “the singular truth” (Keshavan et al., 2013).

Agnosticism, in this regard, should not be conflated with atheism. It does not constitute a wholesale rejection of religion or the denial of God. Rather, it involves suspending judgment about the existence of a divine being or supernatural force, embracing uncertainty and philosophical openness. Agnostics often prioritize reason, empirical inquiry, and personal experience over dogmatic belief. Their moral frameworks are not abandoned, but constructed independently of institutionalized

religion, prompting the fundamental question: Does moral goodness require religious affiliation? (Lightman, 2019). The increasing prevalence of agnosticism among younger generations can be traced to three principal factors:

Education and Access to Information

In the modern world, driven by data, knowledge, and critical paradigms, education is no longer merely a vehicle for the transmission of academic content. Rather, it serves as a crucial arena for shaping human consciousness, particularly in cultivating attitudes that question traditional power structures, including those of politics, economics, and religion. Modern education moves beyond the simple act of knowing and toward the encouragement of thinking: thinking freely, critically, and courageously in relation to inherited norms and practices. This intellectual shift can be understood through the work of key scholars such as Peter L. Berger and Bryan Wilson, who argue that secularization does not signify the disappearance of religion, but rather its gradual retreat from public life and its decreasing influence on the private consciousness of individuals. As scientific knowledge (Kasselstrand et al., 2023), free-market mechanisms, and modern state institutions become the structural pillars of society, religion is increasingly redefined as a personal option rather than a social imperative.

Digital Technology and Social Media

The digital age has not only transformed how humans communicate, but has also fundamentally reshaped how individuals encounter, engage with, and negotiate religious belief and spiritual identity. In particular, social media platforms have emerged as expansive public arenas where users can access a vast array of beliefs, faith traditions, and spiritual worldviews from across the globe, instantly and without restriction. This unprecedented accessibility has effectively dismantled the previously dominant “single-faith structure” that once formed the backbone of religious socialization in pre-digital societies (Rissanen, 2014). In contrast to previous generations—whose exposure to religion was often limited to what was transmitted through families, schools, or local temples—today’s youth grow up in a “religious marketplace”, surrounded by limitless alternatives. Faith is no longer something that is passively inherited; it is something that can be chosen, customized, and even revised. Religious identity in the digital era is marked by fluidity, experimentation, and personalization. Individuals now engage with religious content through YouTube sermons, TikTok reflections, interfaith podcasts, virtual meditation apps, and online communities that transcend national and denominational boundaries. This digital plurality empowers younger generations to explore faith on their own terms, but it also challenges traditional institutions, which often struggle to maintain authority and relevance in a decentralized environment. Consequently, religious belief has become not only more diverse, but also more subject to critical reflection and ideological negotiation, fueled by digital technologies that democratize access to sacred knowledge and pluralize the modes of spiritual engagement.

Focus Group Excerpt: Young Participants (n = 5)

Younger generations are not growing up within a single belief system. Instead, they access a wide range of religious teachings—Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and even alternative spiritualities—through platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and podcasts. All of this is available at their fingertips through a mobile phone. For us, religion is no longer merely a set of beliefs passed down by family or community. It has become something we choose for ourselves. Religious teachings don’t have to come from a temple or a church; they can be consumed through short video clips or meditation apps. Digital technology doesn’t destroy religion—it transforms it. It shifts faith from institutional adherence to a personal quest for inner peace. Many young people today would say they have faith, but not necessarily in any one religion.

Doctrinal Conflicts with Modern Society

In today’s world shaped by ideals of freedom, equality, and pluralistic identity, many doctrines once considered sacred are increasingly subject to critique. This shift does not stem from a generational abandonment of religion, but rather from the inability of certain religious frameworks to fully respond to the realities of the contemporary world. The rise of secular ethics, especially among

younger generations, reflects a transformation from a society grounded in inherited belief to one rooted in individual reason, autonomy, and human rights.

Particularly contentious are religious positions on gender roles, sexual diversity, women's rights, and civil liberties. Many religious traditions remain deeply embedded in patriarchal structures, which privilege male leadership while limiting women's roles and denying full acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. These perspectives, grounded in traditional value systems, often clash with modern democratic ideals that emphasize equality, inclusion, and social justice.

In this context, new generations are increasingly seeking ethical frameworks that are not bound by religious authority, but guided by human experience, critical reasoning, and shared values. This is what Gill (2006) identifies as the emergence of secular faith: a moral orientation that does not reject spirituality but repositions it outside institutionalized religion. For many, this is not a loss of faith, but a shift in where and how faith is lived and articulated.

Focus Group Commentary: Religious Leader

Religion itself is not outdated, but sometimes interpretations remain confined within rigid traditional frameworks. This restricts the space for real inclusion. We need the courage to re-evaluate how religious teachings are communicated so they resonate with the consciousness of people today—without abandoning the core values of the faith.

Focus Group Commentary: Religious Studies Scholar

Religion is deeply rooted in society and culture. But as society evolves, so too do moral questions. If religion cannot respond to these new ethical challenges, it risks becoming irrelevant in daily life. Research across various countries shows that faith persists, but it no longer needs to be tied to traditional institutions.

This tension between institutional doctrine and contemporary values has led many young people to construct alternative moral paths. These paths often draw from secular humanism, feminist ethics, queer theology, or global justice movements—revealing a desire for liberation from dogma rather than a rejection of meaning. The search is not for less morality, but for morality that reflects lived experience, dignity, and pluralism in an interconnected world.

Discussion

This discussion aims to analyze the ideological transition of religion among younger generations through the lens of the sociology of religion. The analysis focuses on three key dynamics: resistance, synthesis, and the construction of new spaces of belief. These processes reveal not only shifting religious expressions, but also the deeper interplay between faith, identity, and power in modern society—relationships that continue to demand critical and nuanced understanding. Drawing upon empirical findings, the research team identified four central themes that characterize how younger generations engage with religion today. Each of these dimensions is examined in greater detail below.

1. Attitudes toward the Role of Religion in Everyday Life
2. Questioning the Authority of Traditional Religious Institutions
3. Personalized and Selective Religious Interpretation
4. The Emergence of Secular Morality.

1. The attitudes of younger generations toward religion reveal a clear shift in both cultural structures and social consciousness. Religion is no longer regarded as the “center of life,” as it once was in traditional societies. Instead, it has become merely one among many “options” through which individuals seek values, meaning, and ethical orientation. This transformation cannot be explained solely by the forces of globalization or the influence of information technology. It is also closely linked to a cognitive shift and a reconfiguration of the systems of legitimation embedded within modern social structures. These findings resonate with the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, whose notion of cultural pluralism emphasizes that modernity has not led to the disappearance of religion. Rather, it has altered its status, turning religion into something that must be consciously chosen or justified to maintain its legitimacy within contemporary contexts (Shapira, 2025).

Within this paradigm, young people increasingly emphasize moral consciousness, goodness, and justice over ritual performance or institutional religious obligation. As such, the declining structural role of religion does not imply a loss of religious value. Instead, it reflects a recasting of religion as a form of cultural capital—a symbolic and emotional resource that individuals draw upon selectively, according to personal needs and social context. For example, religion may be invoked for emotional healing, participation in meaningful rituals on religious holidays, or as an occasional pathway to inner peace—without requiring full institutional affiliation or doctrinal commitment. The attitudinal shift observed among younger generations is not a rejection of religion as a source of sacred meaning, but rather a recalibration of the distance between religion and everyday life. This new orientation allows for the pursuit of a spiritual identity that is more fluid, personalized, and responsive to the demands of a diverse, decentered, and constantly evolving world.

2. The phenomenon of questioning the authority of traditional religion among younger generations has not emerged abruptly, but rather as the cumulative outcome of broader social, educational, and political transformations. Religion, once regarded as an unquestioned institution, is now increasingly subject to critique. It is reconsidered as a construct of power, deeply interwoven with the mechanisms of the state, elite interests, and social orders that prioritize control over emancipation. From Foucault's (2019) perspective, religion as an institution operates in tandem with state power through mechanisms of discursive power and pastoral power. These mechanisms shape people's modes of thinking by deploying discourses of sin, merit, sexuality, and morality. Particularly concerning gender diversity and women's rights, religious discourse often becomes a tool for regulating sexual behavior within the boundaries of legitimacy, grounded in patriarchal values and conservative power structures (Chomsky & Foucault, 2015). Émile Durkheim, by contrast, described religion as a system that generates social cohesion by producing and reinforcing distinctions between the sacred and the profane. Yet, as cultural and identity diversity expands, such cohesion can transform into a mechanism of exclusion. This is visible in practices that restrict women's participation in religious rituals, prohibit LGBTQ+ expressions, or narrowly define "morality" without allowing space for alternative interpretations (Jenson, 2010).

In response, many younger individuals engage in acts of symbolic resistance to religious authority. Examples include refusing to participate in religious ceremonies, rejecting hierarchical gestures such as bowing to religious figures, or campaigning via social media against teachings perceived as violating human rights. These symbolic refusals represent a deeper demand for ethical accountability and institutional transparency within religion. In today's pluralistic and democratic society, religion is thus under growing pressure to reform—to realign with the evolving values of human rights, equality, and cultural diversity. It would be inaccurate to conclude that young people are abandoning religion altogether. Rather, they are calling for religious reform—seeking to reclaim spiritual spaces that are just, inclusive, and reflective of their lived realities.

3. The tendency of younger generations to interpret religion on their own terms reflects a broader transition from religion as an institution to religion as a matter of personal judgment. This shift signifies the decentralization of religious authority and the opening of interpretive space for individual agency in shaping faith. Importantly, many young people are not rejecting religion altogether; rather, they are rejecting traditional interpretive frameworks—those historically controlled by clergy, the state, or ritual orthodoxy—in order to return to the ethical core of religious teachings: compassion, kindness, and justice. This reorientation is not centered on ritual forms—such as prescribed clothing, memorized chants, or hierarchical protocols—but on the ethical intentions behind those practices. It aligns with the theoretical framework of postmodern religion, which posits that in the postmodern era, individuals prioritize personal meaning over systemic form or grand narratives that dictate how a "true religion" must be strictly practiced (Gellner, 1992). Although religion continues to play a role in the lives of many young people, the forms it takes are no longer subject to the same degree of institutional control as in the past. Sacredness is no longer defined exclusively by monks or clerics. Instead, it emerges from the direct experiences of individuals: for example, through meditation, acts of forgiveness, or helping others without reliance on ritual. This phenomenon does not represent the

destruction of religion, but reflects efforts to reconstruct religion in ways that render it meaningful within a rapidly changing world characterized by increasing diversity of identities and ways of life.

4. The rise of secular morality among younger generations reflects a broader cultural and moral transition—from virtue grounded in religious teachings to ethics rooted in universal reason, human dignity, and human rights. This phenomenon is not simply a rejection of religion but signifies a reorientation of moral authority away from religious institutions and toward intellectual reasoning and individual social responsibility. This shift reflects the growing belief that goodness and justice do not require theological justification but can be derived from shared human values such as empathy, fairness, and mutual respect. Young people who turn toward secular ethical frameworks are not abandoning spirituality altogether, but are seeking ethical principles that are inclusive, reason-based, and grounded in the realities of an increasingly diverse and global society.

This trend aligns with the theory of Jürgen Habermas, who argues that in a post-secular society, the religious and the secular must coexist through rational dialogue, grounded in human rights and mutual recognition of diversity, rather than through moral domination by religious authority (Nynas et al., 2012). This phenomenon is reflected in the rise of various civil society movements—such as humanitarian volunteer groups, refugee assistance networks, women’s rights organizations, and environmental advocacy groups—that ground their activities in principles of humanity and mutual support, without the need to reference any specific religion or accompany their actions with religious rituals. Ethical conduct in this context is not tied to a single religious framework, but is enacted based on human dignity, grounded in freedom, equality, respect for difference, and the rejection of identity-based exclusion. For younger generations, such forms of secular morality represent a reorientation of moral authority—from hierarchical structures of control to grassroots practices of care and solidarity. This shift demonstrates that goodness does not require validation through “sacred teachings,” but can instead emerge from compassion, understanding, and reason applied equally to others.

Policy and Practical Recommendations

1. Establish “Provincial Youth Faith Dialogue Councils” in collaboration with temples, churches, mosques, schools, universities, and local administrative bodies. These councils should organize “Debias Dialogue” forums designed to dismantle prejudice, foster cross-generational understanding of religious principles, and provide culturally sensitive dialogue handbooks for youth engagement.

2. Develop curricula on “Interreligious Understanding” for schools, vocational institutions, and universities. In addition, create short modules (3–6 hours) focusing on constitutional rights to religious freedom, comparative faith traditions, and fact-checking tools to counter religious rumors and misinformation.

3. Launch a digital media campaign—“Different Beliefs, Shared Humanity”—in partnership with local influencers. This campaign should feature 60–90 second short-form content highlighting stories of interfaith solidarity within communities (e.g., volunteer work, flood relief, green markets).

4. Implement a “Religious Learning Pathways” program at the municipal or subdistrict level, incorporating study tours of temples, churches, mosques, and shrines. Activities should be documented through field notes and presented as small-scale exhibitions in libraries or community learning centers.

5. Create Legal and Religious Rights Clinics in collaboration with the faculties of law or local legal officers. These clinics would provide preliminary legal advice, training in negotiation, and mediation of minor disputes within schools, universities, and workplaces.

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Entrepreneurial Orientation and New Venture in Thailand's Railway Industry: The Moderating Role of Opportunity Recognition

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study examined the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation (EO) dimensions—innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness—along with opportunity recognition, and new ventures in Thailand's railway industry, which has undergone significant transformation from a state monopoly to increased private sector participation. The research aimed to understand how entrepreneurial capabilities function within a highly regulated, capital-intensive industry in an emerging market context, and how opportunity recognition potentially enhances these relationships.

Introduction/Background: Despite the importance of EO in organizational success across various industries, there is limited research on its role in highly regulated and capital-intensive sectors such as the railway industry, particularly in emerging markets like Thailand. This study addressed this gap by investigating how EO dimensions influence new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry and how opportunity recognition moderates these relationships. The railway industry presents distinctive challenges for entrepreneurship due to high entry barriers, government regulation, complex stakeholder relationships, and substantial capital requirements. These industry-specific factors create a unique context for testing the boundary conditions of entrepreneurial orientation theory and examining how entrepreneurs can succeed despite regulatory constraints.

Methodology: This quantitative study employed survey methodology, collecting data from 174 companies involved in Thailand's railway industry (43.50% response rate). Respondents included company owners, senior executives, and managers from various railway-related businesses such as infrastructure developers, equipment suppliers, operators, and logistics service providers. The questionnaire used 5-point Likert scale items to measure EO dimensions (innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness), opportunity recognition, and new venture performance. The research model was tested using SmartPLS 4.0 to analyze factor loadings, reliability, validity, and hypothesis testing, with appropriate model fit indices (SRMR = .071, Chi-square = 387.002, NFI = .800) confirming the model's validity.

Findings: The results showed that all three dimensions of EO positively influenced new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry, with varying effect sizes. Proactiveness demonstrated the strongest direct effect ($\beta = .643, p < .010$), followed by risk-taking ($\beta = .322, p < .001$) and innovativeness ($\beta = .001, p < .001$). More importantly, opportunity recognition positively moderated the relationships between innovativeness and new venture performance ($\beta = .702, p < .001$) and between risk-taking and new venture performance ($\beta = .669, p < .004$). However, opportunity recognition did not significantly moderate the relationship between proactiveness and new venture performance ($\beta = .513, p = .073$). Interaction analyses revealed that innovativeness and risk-taking primarily enhanced performance when coupled with strong opportunity recognition capabilities, while proactiveness created benefits regardless of opportunity recognition levels. The control variables of company age and size also showed small but significant positive effects on new venture performance ($\beta = .089, p < .05$ and $\beta = .104, p < .05$, respectively).

Contribution/Impact on Society: This study advances understanding of EO and opportunity recognition in regulated industries within emerging markets. It demonstrates how companies can leverage entrepreneurial capabilities despite regulatory constraints, particularly in sectors with significant government involvement. The findings highlight the importance of opportunity recognition as a strategic capability that enhances the effectiveness of entrepreneurial approaches, especially for innovation and risk management in regulated contexts. By identifying which entrepreneurial dimensions benefit most from strong opportunity recognition, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of entrepreneurship in complex regulatory environments. This contributes to both theory development and practical guidance for entrepreneurs in infrastructure sectors undergoing regulatory transition.

Recommendations: For entrepreneurs entering or operating in Thailand's railway industry, developing robust opportunity recognition capabilities is crucial for enhancing innovation outcomes and effectively managing risks. Companies should establish systematic processes for monitoring changes in market demands, technological environments, economic conditions, and regulatory frameworks. These opportunity recognition processes should be particularly connected to innovation and risk management functions, while recognizing that proactive approaches may derive value primarily through execution advantages rather than superior opportunity identification. For policymakers, the study suggests that regulatory frameworks should be designed to create "entrepreneurial space" within necessary safety and operational regulations, potentially through regulatory sandboxes that allow controlled experimentation with new technologies and business models. Industry associations should facilitate knowledge sharing about successful entrepreneurial approaches within regulatory boundaries.

Research Limitations: The study's focus on Thailand's railway sector may limit generalizability to other emerging markets or regulated industries. The reliance on self-reported data from single respondents within each company may introduce common method bias. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences about the relationships examined. The unusually small coefficient for innovativeness requires careful interpretation, though its strong interaction effect suggests its impact primarily manifests through opportunity recognition.

Future Research: Future studies could extend this framework through comparative analyses across different emerging markets or transportation sectors, employ longitudinal designs to examine how entrepreneurial orientation evolves over time in regulated environments, or explore potential negative consequences of entrepreneurial approaches in safety-critical sectors. Research could also investigate the organizational mechanisms that enable effective opportunity recognition in highly regulated contexts and examine how different types of regulations (safety standards, market entry requirements, pricing controls) differentially impact EO dimensions. As digital transformation continues to affect the railway industry, studies could explore how technological disruption creates new entrepreneurial opportunities within regulatory frameworks.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial orientation, opportunity recognition, railway industry, Thailand*

Introduction

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), which consists of Innovativeness, Risk-Taking, and Proactiveness, is widely recognized as a key factor affecting organizational success across various industries (Covin & Wales, 2019; Lumpkin & Dess, 2001). However, the role of EO in the specific context of the growing railway industry has not been extensively studied. This industry has distinctive characteristics such as high entry barriers, government regulation, complex relationships with stakeholders, and substantial capital requirements, all of which may affect opportunity recognition and the success of new ventures. These industry-specific factors create a challenging environment that may require reconsidering and adapting traditional entrepreneurship theories.

Previous research has indicated that companies with an EO are better positioned to identify and exploit new opportunities, even in heavily regulated industries. For example, a research study focusing on the renewable energy industry in Indonesia found positive effects on project performance, enabling companies to navigate regulatory complexities and leverage creative solutions (Firman et al., 2018). Similarly, companies with entrepreneurial mindsets in the railway industry can drive innovation and create new business models, overcome market entry barriers, and achieve competitive advantages (Hranický et al., 2019). In emerging markets, EO can also impact new ventures through opportunity exploitation (Anwar et al., 2022; Saleh & Athari, 2023).

However, the role of EO in transforming regulated industries, such as Thailand's railway sector, remains underexplored. This research gap is particularly significant given that Thailand's railway industry is currently experiencing unprecedented transformation through government modernization initiatives worth over 1.9 trillion baht, designed to position Thailand as a regional transportation hub within the ASEAN Economic Community (Board of Investment of Thailand, 2024). The industry presents unique challenges for entrepreneurship and may require reconsidering traditional entrepreneurship theories, as research has demonstrated that costly regulations significantly hamper new firm creation (Klapper et al., 2006).

To address these gaps, this study aimed to: (1) examine the influence of entrepreneurial orientation dimensions (innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness) on new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry, (2) investigate the moderating role of opportunity recognition on the relationships between EO dimensions and new venture performance in a regulated industry context, and (3) extend the Resource-Based View theory to infrastructure-intensive, regulated sectors in emerging markets, particularly regarding how entrepreneurial capabilities function as strategic resources under regulatory constraints.

This study contributes to both theory and practice in several ways. Theoretically, this study extends the understanding of EO and opportunity recognition in the context of transforming industries in emerging markets, especially in sectors with significant regulatory oversight and government involvement. The research extends the application of the Resource-Based View to explain how entrepreneurial capabilities function as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources in regulated environments. By identifying which entrepreneurial dimensions benefit most from strong opportunity recognition, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of entrepreneurship in complex regulatory environments.

Practically, this research provides timely insights for entrepreneurs and policymakers involved in developing Thailand's railway industry during this critical transformation period. The findings offer guidance on utilizing EO capabilities to discover and exploit opportunities in a developing sector characterized by regulatory complexity and substantial capital requirements. Given similar railway development initiatives across Southeast Asia and other emerging markets, the insights have broader regional relevance for infrastructure development and entrepreneurship policy.

The urgency of this research is underscored by the current momentum in Thailand's railway development, where understanding how entrepreneurial approaches can succeed within regulatory frameworks is essential for maximizing the economic benefits of infrastructure investments and ensuring successful private sector participation in traditionally state-dominated sectors.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Resource-Based View

The Resource-Based View (RBV) serves as the theoretical foundation for this study, offering a framework for understanding how companies create and maintain competitive advantage through unique resource configurations (Barney, 2001). In the context of Thailand's railway industry transformation, RBV explains how entrepreneurially oriented companies differentiate themselves as the market evolves from a state monopoly to increased private sector participation. According to this theory, sustainable competitive advantage stems from resources and capabilities that are Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (VRIN).

Critical VRIN resources include specialized technical knowledge, regulatory expertise, stakeholder relationship networks, and system integration capabilities. These resources are significant given the industry's high market entry barriers and substantial resource requirements. Successful railway ventures require substantial financial capital and specialized human capital with industry-specific technical knowledge and regulatory expertise. The ability to navigate complex regulations and build relationships with multiple stakeholders represents intangible resources that align with RBV's emphasis on non-substitutable capabilities.

Recent extensions of RBV emphasize dynamic capabilities—the ability to reconfigure resources in rapidly changing environments (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). This dynamic perspective is especially relevant to Thailand's developing railway industry, where companies must continuously adapt to technological advances, regulatory changes, and evolving market demands. Opportunity recognition functions as a key dynamic capability that enables firms to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental changes. In this theoretical framework, entrepreneurial orientation dimensions can be conceptualized as dynamic capabilities that enable firms to identify and capitalize on opportunities despite regulatory constraints, while opportunity recognition serves as the sensing mechanism that activates and directs these capabilities.

Thailand's Railway Industry Context

Thailand's railway industry represents a critical component of the country's transportation infrastructure, with approximately 4,845 kilometers of track covering 47 provinces. The State Railway of Thailand has traditionally managed this network, but the industry has faced significant challenges, including aging infrastructure, declining passenger numbers, and operational inefficiencies. The government has initiated comprehensive railway improvement projects to modernize the system and enhance its competitiveness (Ministry of Transport, 2019). Key development initiatives include double-tracking main routes to increase capacity and efficiency, developing high-speed railway systems such as the Bangkok-Nakhon Ratchasima route (part of a network connecting to China through Laos), and expanding urban mass transit systems in Bangkok to improve inner-city connectivity and reduce congestion. These projects aim to transform Thailand into a regional transportation hub, supporting economic growth and urban mobility (Buthphorm et al., 2024).

Despite these advances, the industry faces funding limitations, technological challenges, and implementation delays. The government has established a transport infrastructure investment framework to address these issues, exploring various public-private partnership models to attract private investment. This evolving landscape creates challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurial companies seeking to enter or expand within the railway sector.

New Ventures in Regulated Industries

Operating new ventures in regulated industries, particularly in the railway sector, represents a distinct challenge compared to general markets. Adomako and Danso (2014) found that businesses in regulated environments face unique performance constraints and must consider factors beyond financial indicators, including operational efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction. Performance assessment in regulated industries often incorporates compliance-based indicators, creating specific challenges for entrepreneurs attempting to balance commercial success with regulatory requirements (Guo et al., 2014; Rahman et al., 2020). The regulated nature of the industry means that entrepreneurs must navigate complex regulatory frameworks while pursuing innovation and growth, creating a unique context for studying EO and new venture performance.

Entrepreneurial Orientation and New Ventures

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) represents a firm's strategic approach to introducing new production processes, developing new products, or producing existing products in new ways (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Following Miller (1983) and Covin and Slevin (1989), this study conceptualizes EO through innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness. Previous research has established that

companies with strong entrepreneurial orientation tend to achieve better profitability, growth performance, and market success, though environmental and industry-specific factors often moderate these relationships.

EO plays a crucial role for new ventures throughout the business lifecycle—from initial market entry and opportunity identification to establishing competitive positions and developing sustainable advantages. This is particularly challenging when resources are limited, and market uncertainty is high, requiring entrepreneurs to balance different EO dimensions to align with market conditions and organizational capabilities (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011; Covin & Wales, 2019; Dayan et al., 2023). In the railway industry context, each EO dimension is manifested in distinct ways.

Innovativeness represents a company's creative process and experimentation approach, leading to new products, services, or technological solutions. In the railway industry, innovation may involve developing new maintenance methods, implementing advanced signaling systems, creating novel security approaches, or introducing innovative passenger experience models and pricing structures.

Risk-taking involves committing significant resources to opportunities with uncertain outcomes. This dimension is particularly critical given the capital-intensive nature of the railway industry and the long payback periods typical of infrastructure investments. Railway entrepreneurs must evaluate complex risk factors, including regulatory changes, technological obsolescence, and market demand uncertainties.

Proactiveness reflects a company's tendency to anticipate and act on future needs and opportunities before competitors. In the railway industry, proactive companies position themselves strategically for coming market developments, rapidly adopt emerging technologies, and respond anticipatorily to regulatory changes and market trends.

Research has shown that companies with potent EO can better navigate complex regulatory environments while identifying and exploiting market opportunities (Wales et al., 2020). EO helps companies develop and maintain competitive advantages through continuous innovation (Rauch et al., 2009) and responsive market adaptation. Proactive approaches enable companies to establish strong market positions before competition intensifies (Covin & Slevin, 1989).

Based on these theoretical foundations, this study proposes that despite regulatory constraints and industry-specific challenges, railway companies with entrepreneurial mindsets will achieve superior performance through enhanced innovation capabilities, prudent risk-taking, and proactive operations within the industry's regulatory framework. This leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Innovativeness positively correlates with new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry.

Hypothesis 2: Risk-taking positively relates to new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry.

Hypothesis 3: Proactiveness positively correlates with new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry.

Entrepreneurial Orientation, Opportunity Recognition, and New Venture

Opportunity Recognition is a critical capability for entrepreneurial success, enabling entrepreneurs to identify and capitalize on market gaps and potential value-creation channels. Entrepreneurial opportunities encourage entrepreneurs to allocate sufficient capabilities to respond to market conditions and achieve sustainable business growth (Patel, 2019). Effective opportunity recognition requires experience and expertise, enabling entrepreneurs to comprehensively track, observe, and explore markets to create, deliver, and respond to customer needs and perceptions (Lim et al., 2023; Makhoulfi et al., 2024).

Opportunity recognition is a key driver in identifying valuable capabilities essential for creating unique competitive advantages through entrepreneurial market leverage (Teece, 2016). Kim et al. (2018) noted that capable entrepreneurs understand profitable opportunities, which is fundamental for business survival and growth. Tshiaba et al. (2021) found that entrepreneurial opportunity

recognition helps entrepreneurs track market demands, product positioning, and delivered value, significantly influencing sustainable performance.

Within the RBV framework, opportunity recognition represents a sophisticated dynamic capability that enables firms to sense environmental changes and reconfigure resources accordingly (Teece, 2016). This capability becomes particularly crucial in regulated industries, where traditional market signals may be distorted by government intervention, and where regulatory changes can rapidly create or eliminate business opportunities. In Thailand's railway context, opportunity recognition involves monitoring changes in government policy, technological developments, regional connectivity initiatives, and evolving customer expectations.

This capability enables companies to adapt and respond to market needs through creative resource integration to deliver superior and unique value (Clark & Ramachandran, 2019). Makhloufi et al. (2024) demonstrated that opportunity recognition enhances entrepreneurs' capability to drive business growth, serving as an essential moderator in the relationship between entrepreneurial capabilities and business outcomes. The relationship between opportunity recognition and EO dimensions is multifaceted.

Innovativeness and Opportunity Recognition: Innovative companies are better positioned to apply emerging technologies in the railway industry. For example, innovation-oriented firms may recognize opportunities to implement predictive maintenance systems using IoT sensors or develop new passenger service models through digital platforms (Tang et al., 2012). These companies can identify service gaps and operational inefficiencies as potential business opportunities, particularly relevant in Thailand's railway sector, where new technologies and changing customer expectations are challenging traditional models (Donbesuur et al., 2020).

Risk-taking and Opportunity Recognition: Opportunity recognition plays a crucial role in risk management within the railway industry. Companies with high-risk tolerance are more likely to explore untested market segments and consider opportunities others might avoid due to uncertainty. This is especially important in emerging markets like Thailand, where the railway sector is undergoing significant transformation. Firms with strong opportunity recognition capabilities can better evaluate potential returns relative to regulatory and market risks (Kuckertz et al., 2016).

Proactiveness and Opportunity Recognition: Proactiveness enables companies to anticipate future market demands and identify emerging opportunities before competitors. Proactive companies are better positioned in the railway industry to recognize opportunities arising from policy changes, technological advancements, and evolving market dynamics. For example, proactive firms may identify opportunities such as clean energy transportation solutions or integrated mobility services before these become mainstream market demands (Wales et al., 2020).

The moderating effect of opportunity recognition may vary across different dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation. For innovation, a high opportunity recognition capability can help companies identify which innovative solutions are likely to succeed in the market. For risk-taking, effective opportunity recognition enhances risk assessment and return evaluation, resulting in more informed strategic decisions. For proactiveness, opportunity recognition capability enhances the timing and targeting of initiatives to align with emerging market opportunities.

Empirical evidence from related industries supports these moderated relationships. Tang et al. (2012) found that companies with high opportunity recognition capabilities can better translate their entrepreneurial approaches into superior performance. Similarly, Guo et al. (2014) demonstrated that the effectiveness of strategic approaches in regulated industries significantly depends on a company's ability to recognize and evaluate opportunities within the regulatory context.

Based on these theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Opportunity recognition positively moderates the relationship between innovativeness and new venture performance, such that the relationship is stronger when opportunity recognition is high.

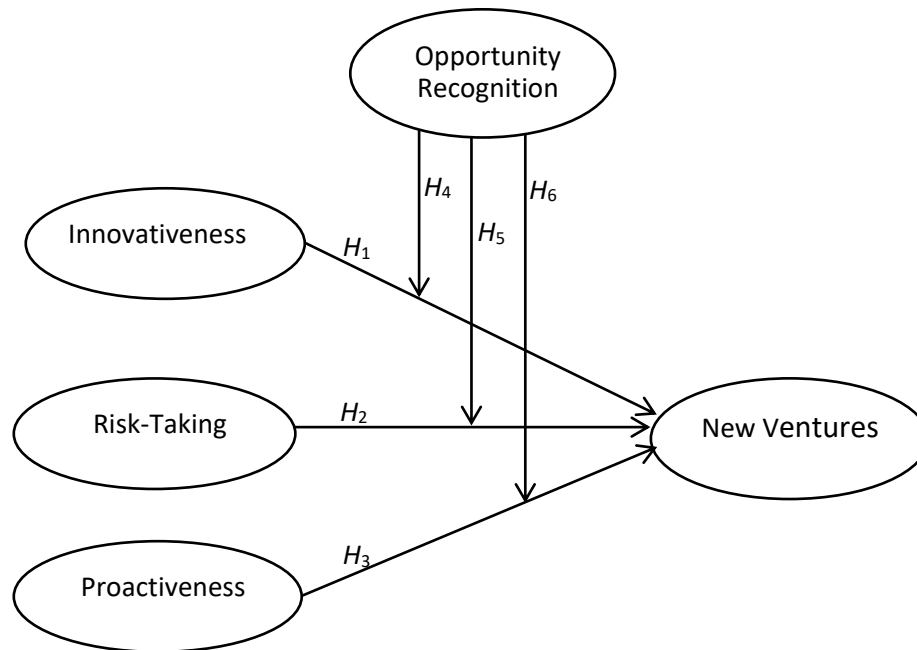
Hypothesis 5: Opportunity recognition positively moderates the relationship between risk-taking and new venture performance, such that the relationship is stronger when opportunity recognition is high.

Hypothesis 6: Opportunity recognition positively moderates the relationship between proactiveness and new venture performance, such that the relationship is stronger when opportunity recognition is high.

Research Framework

The study's conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework of the Research*



Methodology

Sample Group

This study employed a quantitative research approach using cross-sectional survey methodology to examine relationships between entrepreneurial orientation dimensions, opportunity recognition, and new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry. A cross-sectional design was selected over a longitudinal approach due to the practical constraints of data collection in the highly regulated railway sector and the need to capture relationships at a specific point during Thailand's railway transformation period. The target population comprised companies involved in Thailand's railway industry, including both private firms and public-private partnerships operating within the railway ecosystem. Based on government registrations and industry association memberships, approximately 400 companies were identified as actively engaged in railway-related business activities.

A stratified purposive sampling approach was employed to ensure representation across different railway industry segments, including railway infrastructure developers and maintainers, railway equipment suppliers, railway operators, railway logistics service providers, railway technology and signaling companies, and railway consultancy and engineering firms. From the total population of 400 companies, questionnaires were distributed to all identified firms through electronic (email) and physical delivery methods. The final sample consisted of 174 companies, representing 43.5% of the total population. This response rate compares favorably with similar studies in business-to-business research contexts (Baruch & Holtom, 2008).

To minimize non-response bias, early and late respondents were compared across key variables, with no significant differences identified. Since EO studies require insights from decision-makers,

respondents included owners (17.82%), senior executives (47.13%), and departmental managers (35.06%). The detailed demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Owners/Managers	Owner	31	17.81
	Senior executive	82	47.13
	Manager	61	35.06
	Total	174	100.00
Nature of Company	Railway infrastructure developer/maintainer	29	16.67
	Railway equipment supply	40	22.99
	Railway operator	5	2.87
	Railway logistics service provider	17	9.77
	Railway technology and signaling	24	13.79
	Railway consultancy and engineering	38	21.84
	Others	21	12.07
	Total	174	100.00
Period of Operation	Less than three years	42	24.14
	3 to 6 years	56	32.18
	7 to 10 years	36	20.69
	10 years or more	40	22.99
	Total	174	100.00
Size of Firm	10–50 employees	96	55.17
	51–200 employees	45	25.86
	More than 200 employees	33	18.97
	Total	174	100.00

Tools and Measurement Methods

Questionnaires were the research tool used to collect data from the sample group. The questions were referenced from previous studies (Existing Scales). Since the referenced questions were in English, the researchers translated them into Thai and verified their accuracy through Double-blind back-translation (Sinaiko & Brislin, 1973). Additionally, the Thai language was adjusted to make it easier for respondents to understand. The referenced questions on applied innovation were adapted from studies on EO, including new ventures adapted from Anwar et al. (2022), innovation creation, risk-taking, and proactive implementation used in previous studies (Covin & Slevin, 1989; Shirokova et al., 2016). The measurement of opportunity perception was derived from a study by Guo et al. (2016). All questions asked for respondents' opinions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree).

Content validity was confirmed through expert review by three investment and logistics specialists, with all Index of Item Objective Congruence values exceeding .50. A pilot study with 30 participants from similar companies established reliability, with all Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

This study's cross-sectional design and self-reported data could be prone to common method bias (CMB). To address this, the researchers followed Podsakoff et al. (2003) by using different measurement anchors and assuring respondent anonymity. CMB was further assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), which showed the first factor accounted for 48% of the total variance, which was below the 50% threshold, and indicated no substantial evidence of CMB.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Partial Least Squares (PLS) was selected as the primary analytical method using SmartPLS 4.0 software. PLS-SEM was chosen over covariance-based SEM due to its superior performance with smaller samples, suitability for exploratory research extending existing theory to new contexts, robustness to non-normal data distributions, and capability to handle model complexity, including moderation analysis (Hair et al., 2022). The analysis procedure included

measurement model assessment (factor loadings, internal consistency reliability, convergent and discriminant validity), structural model evaluation (model fit indices, path coefficients, significance testing), moderation analysis using established PLS-SEM procedures, and robustness testing through bootstrap resampling with 5,000 iterations for confidence interval estimation (Hair et al., 2022).

Results

In this study, the researchers used SmartPLS 4.0 to test the model fit, model consistency, and the hypotheses. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, factor loadings, reliability measures, and validity indicators. All factor loadings exceeded the minimum threshold of .40 (Hair et al., 2005), ranging from .718 to .883, indicating that observed variables adequately reflect their respective constructs. Internal consistency reliability was confirmed through multiple indicators. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .758 to .895, exceeding the .70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from .770 to .908, further confirming internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from .523 to .731, surpassing the .50 minimum requirement (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The variance inflation factor (VIF) results showed that the VIF values of the indicators ranged from 1.66 to 2.40, and the error values ranged from .42 to .60. Therefore, all variables were within acceptable threshold levels ($VIF < 3.3$, error value $> .20$) as recommended by Hair et al. (2011), indicating that there was no problem of multicollinearity among independent variables affecting the dependent variable.

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha, Factor Loading, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted

Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
New Venture Cronbach's Alpha = .771			
1. Return on investment	.861	.793	.523
2. Return on assets	.842		
3. Return on equity	.718		
4. Sale growth	.857		
Opportunity Recognition Cronbach's Alpha = .877			
1. Identifying opportunities from customer demand changes	.833	.908	.674
2. Identifying opportunities from technological changes	.883		
3. Identifying opportunities from economic changes	.867		
4. Searching and identifying opportunities from changes in the political environment	.743		
Entrepreneurial Orientation			
Innovativeness Cronbach's Alpha = .758			
1. Focus on research & development, technology, innovation	.871	.770	.537
2. Having new products or services in the past 5 years	.828		
3. Clear changes in product lines or services	.781		
Risk-taking Cronbach's Alpha = .895			
1. Investing in high-risk projects	.866	.866	.731
2. Taking actions to achieve company objectives	.883		
3. Making uncertain decisions to increase business opportunities	.739		
Proactiveness Cronbach's Alpha = .807			
1. Initiating new activities before competitors	.847	.798	.593
2. Introducing new products/services, management techniques, operational technologies, etc.	.861		
3. Taking actions to outperform competitors	.856		

Table 3 Mean, Reliability, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Values Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. New Venture	4.397	.976	.500**				
2. Opportunity Recognition	4.550	.903	.101**	.692**			
3. Innovativeness	3.658	1.295	.091**	.031*	.393**		
4. Risk-taking	4.987	.982	.568**	.532**	.659**	.805*	
5. Proactiveness	4.094	.895	.672**	.479**	.517**	.731*	.655**

Note. From a sample of 174 samples, SD = Standard Deviation ** p -value < .01; * p -value < .05

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix, means, and standard deviations for all study variables, providing initial support for the hypothesized relationships. The correlation analysis showed that new venture performance demonstrated positive correlations with all entrepreneurial orientation dimensions: innovativeness ($r = .091, p < .01$), risk-taking ($r = .568, p < .01$), and proactiveness ($r = .672, p < .01$). Opportunity recognition showed significant positive correlations with new venture performance ($r = .101, p < .01$) and all EO dimensions, while inter-construct correlations among EO dimensions ranged from moderate to strong (.500 to .731), suggesting related but distinct constructs. The relatively modest correlation between innovativeness and new venture performance ($r = .091$) suggests that innovation alone may not directly translate to performance benefits, potentially requiring moderating conditions such as opportunity recognition for effective implementation.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model evaluation began with assessing model fit indices, which indicated appropriate fit with empirical data (SRMR = .071, Chi-square = 387.002, NFI = .800). These values met the established thresholds for acceptable model fit in PLS-SEM analysis, which is considered satisfactory given the model's complexity and industry context (Sathyanarayana & Mohanasundaram, 2024).

To test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, the direct relationships between EO dimensions and new venture performance were examined. The analysis revealed that all three dimensions—innovativeness ($\beta = .298, p < .001$), risk-taking ($\beta = .322, p < .001$), and proactiveness ($\beta = .643, p < .010$)—had statistically significant positive effects on new venture performance. These findings supported Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, confirming that EO dimensions positively influence new venture performance in Thailand's railway industry despite its highly regulated nature.

Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 examined the moderating role of opportunity recognition in the relationship between EO dimensions and new venture performance. The interaction analysis results (Table 4) showed that opportunity recognition significantly moderated relationships between innovativeness and new venture performance ($\beta = .702, p < .001$), and risk-taking and new venture performance ($\beta = .669, p < .004$). However, the moderating effect of opportunity recognition on the relationship between proactiveness and new venture performance was not statistically significant ($\beta = .513, p = .073$). Therefore, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were supported, while Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

Table 4 Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

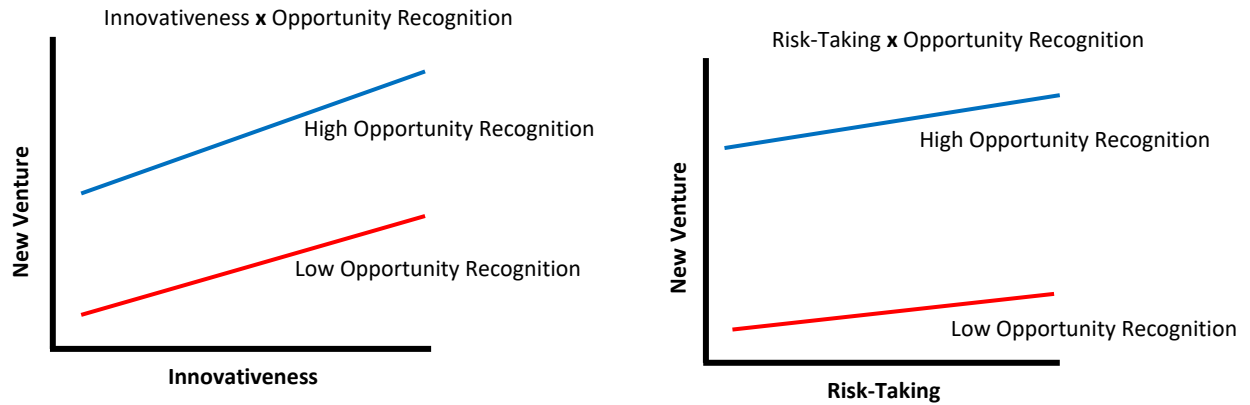
Hypothesis	Relationship	β	S.E.	p -value	Results
H_1	Innovativeness $\rightarrow$ new ventures	.298	.087	.001***	Supported
H_2	Risk-taking $\rightarrow$ new ventures	.322	.104	.001***	Supported
H_3	Proactiveness $\rightarrow$ new venture	.643	.101	.010**	Supported
H_4	Innovativeness x opportunity recognition $\rightarrow$ new ventures	.702	.080	.001***	Supported
H_5	Risk-taking x opportunity recognition $\rightarrow$ new ventures	.669	.122	.004**	Supported
H_6	Proactiveness x opportunity recognition $\rightarrow$ new ventures	.513	.112	.073	Not Supported

Note. Statistical significance levels: *** p value < .001; ** p value < .01.

Moderating Effects Analysis

To provide a more nuanced understanding of the significant moderating effects, interaction plots were created following Aiken and West's (1991) approach. This involved calculating conditional effects at different levels of opportunity recognition (mean $\pm$ one standard deviation) and graphically representing these interactions, which are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 *Interaction Effects of Opportunity Recognition*



The interaction graphs in Figure 2 show how opportunity recognition moderates the relationships between entrepreneurial orientation dimensions and new venture performance. For Innovativeness (left graph), the slope was steeper when opportunity recognition is high (+1 SD) compared to low (-1 SD), indicating a stronger positive effect of innovativeness on new venture performance when opportunity recognition was well-developed. For Risk-taking (right graph), the slope was also steeper under high opportunity recognition, though the difference was less pronounced.

Comparing the two interaction effects, the innovativeness graph showed a more substantial difference between high and low opportunity recognition conditions, suggesting that opportunity recognition enhances the innovativeness-performance relationship more than the risk-taking-performance relationship. This implies that companies with strong opportunity recognition capabilities can especially benefit from their innovative activities, as they are better positioned to identify innovations that align with market needs and regulatory requirements in Thailand's railway industry.

The non-significant moderating effect for proactiveness (Hypothesis 6) indicated that the relationship between proactive behavior and new venture performance remains largely unchanged regardless of opportunity recognition levels. This finding may reflect the unique characteristics of Thailand's railway industry, where regulatory frameworks and government planning may limit the impact of proactive market initiatives, even with strong opportunity recognition.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research has generated new insights into the role of EO and opportunity recognition in the context of the regulated railway industry, particularly in emerging markets such as Thailand. The findings showed that innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness—dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation—have positive relationships with new ventures. This is consistent with previous research by Wales et al. (2020), which found that EO is a key factor for success in regulated industries, and the study by Yu et al. (2023), which indicated that the three dimensions of EO affected the ability to make new innovative investments. These three dimensions contribute to investment success in emerging markets, where companies have utilized the benefits of monitoring technological changes and customers' needs to seize new opportunities (Anim et al., 2024).

In the context of Thailand's railway industry, these findings are significant as they demonstrate that opportunity recognition facilitates new ventures despite regulatory limitations and infrastructure challenges. This aligns with Wang et al. (2017), who found that new ventures with entrepreneurial

orientation—expressed through innovative decision-making, risk-taking, and proactive behaviors—can achieve superior performance if companies understand and follow regulations and stakeholder norms. Similarly, Guo et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of integrating strategic capabilities and opportunity recognition in regulated industries. Companies with strong opportunity recognition capabilities promote EO in innovation and are more likely to make new ventures. The research found that opportunity recognition helps entrepreneurs use resources creatively, consistent with Kuckertz et al. (2016), who emphasized the importance of opportunity recognition in managing risk in regulated industries. This research shows that companies which can efficiently identify and evaluate opportunities can better leverage their innovation capabilities and risk acceptance under regulatory constraints.

However, this research found that opportunity recognition did not moderate the relationship between proactiveness and new ventures, which may be explained by the specific characteristics of the railway industry. As Porter and Kramer (2011) have noted, companies, especially in heavily regulated industries, must integrate social and regulatory expectations into their core strategic activities. Therefore, proactive actions may be limited by regulatory frameworks, rules, and legal requirements, reducing the influence of opportunity recognition on the outcomes of proactive actions. The findings also align with Shin's (2024) study of the U.S. railway freight industry, which indicated that regulations affect competitive operations and long-term efficiency improvement in the railway transport sector. Thus, this research expands understanding of the relationship between EO and opportunity recognition in the context of regulated industries in emerging markets, particularly the findings about the different moderating roles of opportunity recognition on all three dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings demonstrated that entrepreneurial capabilities function as valuable strategic resources in regulated industries, but their effectiveness depends on complementary capabilities such as opportunity recognition. This extends RBV theory by showing that resource value is contingent on sensing and deployment capabilities, particularly in institutionally constrained environments. The results supported conceptualizing opportunity recognition as a dynamic capability that enhances the effectiveness of other strategic resources (Teece, 2016). The differential moderating effects across EO dimensions suggest that sensing capabilities interact differently with various types of strategic resources, providing nuanced insights into dynamic capability theory.

This study revealed that regulatory constraints reshape, rather than eliminate, entrepreneurial opportunities, requiring different capability combinations for value creation in regulated environments. Railway entrepreneurs should develop systematic processes to monitor regulatory, technological, and market changes, while prioritizing proactive strategies that deliver the most direct performance benefits, combining innovation with strong market sensing to ensure regulatory compliance and market alignment, and leveraging opportunity recognition to guide, rather than avoid, risk assessment. Policymakers should create entrepreneurial space within regulatory frameworks through innovation sandboxes and pilot programs, provide clear regulatory roadmaps to help entrepreneurs anticipate policy changes, facilitate knowledge sharing about successful approaches within regulatory boundaries, and design procurement processes that reward entrepreneurial innovation while maintaining safety and quality standards.

Limitations and Future Research

This study focused on Thailand's railway sector, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other emerging markets or regulated industries. Future research could expand this framework through comparative studies across different markets or transportation sectors (Donbesuur et al., 2020). The reliance on self-reported data from a single respondent per company raises concerns of common method bias. Future studies could enhance validity by using data from multiple sources and more objective measures (Tang et al., 2012). Additionally, the study did not address the risks of entrepreneurial approaches in regulated industries, particularly in safety-critical sectors. Future

research could investigate both the positive and negative consequences of entrepreneurial orientations in strictly regulated contexts (Covin & Wales, 2019).

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Examining Actual and Perceived VARK Learning Preferences Among Secondary Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

Aims/Purpose: The main objectives of this study were to assess whether students' perceptions of their learning preferences were aligned with their actual learning preferences and to evaluate the extent of their metacognitive awareness in this regard. The study aimed to evaluate secondary school students' awareness of their personal learning preferences as framed by the VARK model, which categorizes learning styles into four modalities: Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic.

Methodology: A quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the correlations between students' perceived learning preferences and their actual preferences. Statistical methods, including Chi-Square tests, were applied to evaluate the strength and significance of these relationships. Data were collected from a convenience sample of secondary school students, with a slight overrepresentation of female and lower-secondary students drawn from a single educational institution in Malaysia.

Findings: The findings revealed a nuanced picture of metacognitive awareness among students. No significant correlations were found between perceived and actual learning preferences in the Read/Write and Kinesthetic modalities. This lack of association indicated a low alignment between students' preferred learning modes and their actual preferences in these two categories. Such matches between perceived and actual preferences for Read/Write and Kinesthetic modalities were likely due to chance rather than genuine metacognitive insight. Consequently, the null hypothesis—that there was no relationship between perceived and actual learning preferences—could not be rejected for these two modalities.

Significant positive relationships were observed for the Visual and Aural learning modes. Students exhibited a higher level of metacognitive awareness when recognizing their preferences for learning through visual and auditory means. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected for the Visual and Aural modalities, implying that students' self-perceptions in these domains were more accurate and reflected their learning preferences.

Gender differences emerged as an essential factor in metacognitive awareness. Female participants demonstrated a slightly higher level of cognitive insight, with significant correlations identified between perceived and actual learning preferences for the Visual and Aural modes. By contrast, male participants showed no statistically significant alignment for any learning modalities, suggesting comparatively lower metacognitive awareness among males in this sample.

Educational level also appeared to influence awareness. Only the Visual learning mode displayed a statistically significant relationship among lower secondary students between perceived and actual preferences. The Aural mode approached significance ($p = .057$) but did not reach conventional levels. No significant correlations were found among upper secondary students for any learning mode, indicating a possible decline or variability in metacognitive awareness as students progress through secondary education.

When examining the overall concordance between perceived and actual learning preferences across the entire sample, 75.7% of participants showed weak alignment. Only 13.6% of the

participants demonstrated complete alignment, and 10.7% of participants had no alignment. These findings highlighted a concerning portion of students who lack metacognitive awareness of their learning styles.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This study helps students become aware of their perceived and actual learning styles, promoting self-awareness and giving them a sense of control over their learning. Recognizing personal learning preferences—such as those identified in the VARK model—can also improve learning outcomes. Belief in their own abilities is a key to overcoming challenges and achieving academic success.

School personnel, such as administrators, educational policymakers, and teachers, may benefit from this study of students' learning styles. Its findings can inform the development of more effective curricula, teaching strategies, and programs that better support student success.

Additionally, parents or caregivers can use this information to guide their children's education. By understanding their children's unique learning styles, parents can provide more meaningful support and foster a home environment that complements their educational needs.

Research Limitations: While this study contributes valuable insights, it was subject to several limitations. The convenience sampling method and the focus on a single institution reduced the generalizability of the findings. The sample was skewed towards females and lower secondary students, which may have influenced the observed trends.

Recommendations: Students generally demonstrate limited awareness of their learning preferences, particularly male students, which may negatively impact their academic performance. Therefore, learning style frameworks should be used to encourage students to reflect critically on how they learn and to experiment with diverse strategies rather than pigeonholing them into fixed categories.

Teachers should use learning style models as starting points for discussions, encouraging students to explore and reflect on their learning processes and promote flexibility rather than fixed labeling. Regular professional development should be provided for educators on the practical, evidence-based use of learning styles to enhance metacognitive skills rather than simply categorizing learners.

Future Research: Future research should include more diverse and randomized samples across multiple educational contexts to validate and extend these findings. Given the gender disparities identified, further research is also warranted to examine the underlying causes of these differences, potentially involving psychological, social, or cultural factors.

Since metacognition is closely linked to self-regulation, understanding the factors contributing to lower metacognitive awareness is critical. Future investigations should explore how educational interventions can nurture and improve metacognitive skills, including applying learning style models like VARK.

The scope of future research should be broadened to investigate how learning preference awareness interacts with demographic factors such as age, gender, and cultural background. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how metacognitive awareness evolves with targeted interventions over time.

Keywords: *VARK, perceived learning preferences, secondary students, Malaysia*

Introduction

Learning styles, which Keefe (1979) defines as “characteristic cognitive, affective, and psychological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment,” have been a subject of interest among educators for a long time, especially over the last four decades (Felder, 2020). The usefulness of learning style models in education has been a point of contention among educators, with some experts going so far as to reject their use altogether (Benians & Brian, 2024; Chew, 2016; Felder, 2020). However, Felder (2020) argues that this rejection of various learning styles models is based on the flawed “meshing

hypothesis” of designing and matching instruction to the individual learning styles of specific students.

The VARK model in particular has often been the target of this ongoing debate (Benians & Brian, 2024; Chew, 2016; Fleming & Mills, 1992). However, the primary intent behind developing the VARK model was not to match instruction to individual learning preferences, but rather to encourage metacognitive thinking and self-regulation among students (Fleming & Mills, 1992; Fleming, 1995). Research into the potential usefulness of the VARK model in encouraging metacognition and self-regulation among students has been limited, and the research that has been done has largely focused on students from tertiary learning institutions (Barman et al., 2014). This study aimed to address this gap in the literature and investigate the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between students’ perceived and actual learning preferences.

The purpose of this study was to explore students' awareness of their personal learning preference. To investigate students' learning and perceived learning preferences, a quantitative method was employed using a survey. The survey instrument consisted of three questions related to demographic information, a brief explanation of the VARK model of learning preferences, a question for students to report their perceived learning preferences, and the VARK Questionnaire. There were three major questions to address this study's purpose:

1. How do students perceive their personal learning preference?
2. What is the actual learning preference of students?
3. What is the relationship between perceived and actual learning preferences?

The hypothesis (H_0): There is no relationship between perceived and actual learning preferences.

A total of 104 students participated in this study. Participants were selected through a convenience sampling method. Survey papers were distributed to available students over the course of one week. Participation was voluntary.

This study was delimited to a single private secondary school in Malaysia. As such, this study sought to address this research gap by exploring VARK learning preferences within the context of a private secondary school in Malaysia.

Review of Literature

Learning Style

Learning styles refer to how individual learners, such as school students, receive and process new information. Fleming and Mills (1992) noted that students respond to various learning situations in different yet consistent ways. Felder views learning styles as “common patterns of student preferences for different approaches to instruction” (Felder, 2020, p. 3).

Various learning style models have been proposed to provide teachers with practical conceptual frameworks to plan instruction that addresses the needs of different learners in the classroom (Felder, 2020). One such model is the VARK model, which focuses on sensory modality preferences (Fleming & Mills, 1992). The following sections will provide a detailed discussion of the VARK model and its applications for teachers and students.

VARK Model of Learning Preferences

The VARK model of learning preferences, first described in 1992, was initially developed for students and teachers to understand individual learning preferences better and make necessary adjustments in learning and teaching behavior (Fleming & Mills, 1992). The model focuses on sensory modal preference, a subcomponent within a student’s learning style. The acronym VARK represents four sensory modality preferences, or modal preferences, that individuals use to receive and process information: Visual (V), Aural (A), Read/Write (R), and Kinesthetic (K).

Fleming developed the VARK questionnaire to help students and teachers identify and reflect on their preferred learning styles, also known as their modal preferences. More recent studies support

the validity of the VARK questionnaire as a tool to gauge modal preferences among students (Fitkov-Norris & Yeghiazarian, 2015; Leite et al., 2010; Thepsatitporn & Pichitpornchai, 2016).

VARK as a Tool To Improve Learning and Teaching Effectiveness

The VARK model provides a framework for teachers to assess their own teaching methods (Fleming & Mills, 1992). Specific teaching strategies may target one learning preference above others (Amanian et al., 2020), so teachers must ensure that the teaching methods used in class appeal to a wide range of learning preferences (Wege & Keil, 2020). Teachers can use the VARK questionnaire to identify instructional strategies that effectively address a wide range of learners (Wright & Stokes, 2015).

The VARK model also allows teachers to train students to use effective study strategies that are aligned with their preferences. In a study by Barman et al. (2014), students who were trained to use effective study strategies based on their VARK learning preferences significantly increased their GPA scores. A similar study by Bhagat et al. (2015) found that after six training and discussion sessions based on the VARK model, students could effectively incorporate different study skills into their learning. This study also highlighted the importance of learning preference awareness for students. The following section discusses learning preference awareness among students and its potential link to self-efficacy and self-regulation.

Learning Preference Awareness Among Students

Awareness of individual learning preferences benefits students as it helps them to identify strengths and areas for improvement (Felder, 2020). Using a model such as VARK encourages students to reflect on their study habits and modify their behavior to improve learning (Fleming & Mills, 1992). In other words, VARK may promote self-regulation in the student.

Self-regulation has been defined as “the extent to which learners are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, the strategies they use to learn, can motivate themselves to engage in learning, and can develop strategies and tactics to enhance learning” (Muijs & Bokhove, 2020, p. 5). An essential component of self-regulation is metacognition, which is defined as “the ways learners can monitor and purposefully direct their learning” (Muijs & Bokhove, 2020, p. 5). The VARK model itself was initially conceived as a way to encourage metacognition among students, allowing them to take an active role in their learning (Fleming & Mills, 1992), and more recent studies have noted that VARK has been successful in doing so (Bhagat et al., 2015; Ojeh et al., 2023).

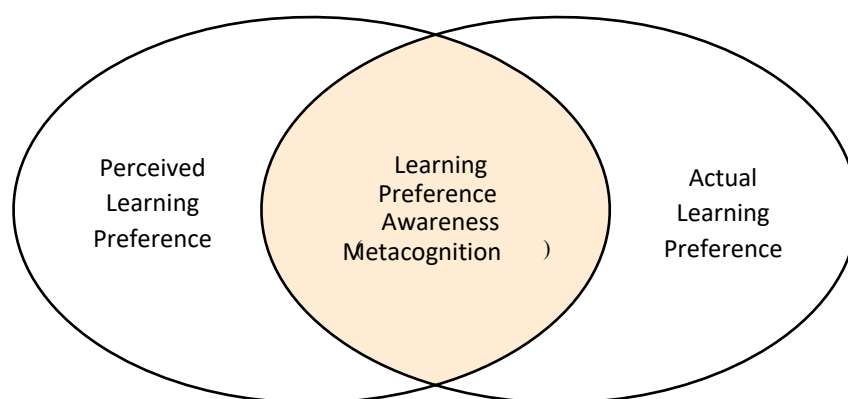
By enabling students to be more engaged in the learning process, awareness of learning preference also aids in developing student self-efficacy, as self-efficacy has been strongly linked to metacognition (Celik, 2022). Bandura (2010) defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations”. Ojeh et al. (2023) linked learning style awareness to self-efficacy, and Onu et al. (2022) highlighted the potential of using the VARK model to develop self-efficacy in students.

Besides potential benefits related to self-regulation, metacognition, and self-efficacy, awareness of VARK modal preferences may lead to improvements in learning by encouraging students to explore different sensory modalities and learning strategies (Bhagat et al., 2015), as incorporating multiple modalities while studying may result in better retention of information (El-Saftawy et al., 2024).

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework used in the present study. Students’ perceived and actual VARK learning preferences were treated as two independent variables. Metacognitive awareness of learning preferences, or simple learning preference awareness, was conceptualized as the extent to which these two variables overlap. More overlap indicated a higher level of metacognitive awareness, and a lower degree of overlap indicated lower levels of awareness among students. This conceptual framework is aligned with Fleming and Mills’ (1992) original goal of “assisting students to know themselves and operate in a metacognitive fashion.”

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*



Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore students' level of awareness of their personal learning preference.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

1. How do students perceive their personal learning preference?
 2. What is the actual learning preference of students?
 3. What is the relationship between perceived learning preference and actual learning preference?
- H₀: There is no relationship between perceived and actual learning preferences.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study used a cross-sectional correlational research design to investigate students' learning preferences and perceptions about them. The survey instrument consisted of three demographic questions, a brief explanation of the VARK model of learning preferences, a question for students to report their perceived learning preference, and the Malay version of the VARK Questionnaire (*Soalanselidik VARK dalam Bahasa Melayu*, n.d.). Validity of the VARK Questionnaire has been supported by previous studies (Fitkov-Norris & Yeghiazarian, 2015; Leite et al., 2010).

Population and Sampling

Most prior studies focused on students from a single university course (Awang et al., 2017; Bhagat et al., 2015; Mozaffari et al., 2020). This limitation means that these studies' results may be difficult to generalize, as certain university courses may naturally appeal to students with certain learning preferences. This study sought to address this research gap by exploring VARK learning preferences within the context of a private secondary school in Malaysia. Students at this school do not choose a particular course of study, so the sample used in this study may be more representative of a broader population.

The school student population consisted of 356 students, aged 12-17. A total of 104 students participated in the present study. Due to time constraints, participants were selected through a convenience sampling method. Data collection took place from November 25 to 29, 2024. Survey papers were distributed to students who volunteered to participate in the study. Participants were guided by one of the researchers, and surveys were immediately collected after completion. No compensation was offered. Permission and approval of the survey instrument were obtained from the school administration prior to the data collection period, and all participants gave informed consent.

Data Analysis

After the data collection period, the VARK scores of the participants were calculated using a key provided by the publisher. The raw scores were sent to an expert for analysis to determine the learning preference of each participant.

The data were then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency distributions of gender, age, and learning preference were used to address research questions 1 and 2, while the Chi-Square test of independence was used to investigate the relationship between perceived and actual learning preference (research question 3). One survey was excluded from the results due to failure to complete the demographic questions.

Results

Table 1 reports the demographic distribution and learning preferences of the respondents in this study. The most common perceived learning preference was Visual ($n = 73$).

Table 1 Demographic Distribution and Learning Preferences (N = 103)

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	39	37.9
Female	64	62.1
Age Group		
Lower Secondary	62	60.2
Upper Secondary	41	39.8
Perceived Learning Preference		
Visual	73	70.9
Aural	63	61.2
Read/Write	64	62.1
Kinesthetic	65	63.1
Actual Learning Preference		
Visual	61	59.2
Aural	79	76.7
Read/Write	65	63.1
Kinesthetic	88	85.4
Overall Learning Preference		
Unimodal	26	25.2
Bimodal	16	15.5
Trimodal	9	8.7
Four-part	52	50.5

However, the most common actual learning preference was Kinesthetic ($n = 88$), and this result was consistent across genders and age groups. Nearly three-fourths (74.7%) of the respondents had a multimodal (at least two modes) learning preference ($n = 77$), with the four-part preference learning preference being the most common ($n = 52$).

Table 2 reports the result of a Chi-square test of independence between perceived and actual learning preferences. Significant relationships were found between respondents' perceived and actual learning preferences for the Visual ($\chi^2 = 6.48$, $df = 1$, $p = .011$) and Aural category ($\chi^2 = 5.01$, $df = 1$, $p = .025$). A total of 65.1% of respondents correctly identified their preference ($n = 67$) for both categories respectively, indicating that respondents were more likely to be aware of their Visual and Aural preferences. No significant relationship was found between Perceived and Actual learning preferences for the Read/Write and Kinesthetic preferences.

Table 2 *Perceived vs Actual Learning Preference* (Overall, N = 103)

Perceived	Actual		Total	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>	Cramer's V
	No	Yes					
Visual							
No	18 (17.5)	12 (11.7)	30 (29.1)	6.48	1	.011*	.251
Yes	24 (23.3)	49 (47.6)	73 (70.9)				
Total	42 (40.8)	61 (59.2)	103 (100.0)				
Aural							
No	14 (13.6)	26 (25.2)	40 (38.8)	5.01	1	.025*	.221
Yes	10 (9.7)	53 (51.5)	63 (61.2)				
Total	24 (23.3)	79 (76.7)	103 (100.0)				
Read/Write							
No	17 (16.5)	22 (21.4)	39 (37.9)	1.21	1	.272	.108
Yes	21 (20.4)	43 (41.7)	64 (62.1)				
Total	38 (36.9)	65 (63.1)	103 (100.0)				
Kinesthetic							
No	6 (5.8)	32 (31.1)	38 (36.9)	.073	1	.787	.027
Yes	9 (8.7)	56 (54.4)	65 (63.1)				
Total	15 (14.6)	88 (85.4)	103 (100.0)				

Tables 3 and 4 report the results of a Chi-square test of independence between perceived and actual learning preferences for male and female respondents. Among male respondents, no significant relationship was found between perceived and actual learning preferences for any of the categories. However, among female respondents, significant relationships were found for the Visual ($\chi^2 = 5.27$, $df = 1$, $p = .022$) and Aural ($\chi^2 = 10.7$, $df = 1$, $p = .001$) preferences, indicating a greater level of awareness regarding learning preferences for these two categories. A total of 68.7% ($n = 44$) of female respondents correctly identified their Visual preference, and 71.9% ($n = 46$) correctly identified their Aural preference.

Table 3 *Perceived vs Actual Learning Preference* (Male, N = 39))

Perceived	Actual		Total	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>	Cramer's V
	No	Yes					
Visual							
No	8 (20.5)	5 (12.8)	13 (33.3)	1.28	1	.257	.181
Yes	11 (28.2)	15 (38.5)	26 (66.7)				
Total	19 (48.7)	20 (51.3)	39				
Aural							
No	3 (7.7)	11 (28.2)	14 (35.9)	.203	1	.652	.072
Yes	7 (17.9)	18 (46.2)	25 (64.1)				
Total	10 (25.6)	29 (74.4)	39				
Read/Write							
No	6 (15.4)	6 (15.4)	12 (30.8)	.29	1	.59	.086
Yes	11 (28.2)	16 (41.0)	27 (69.2)				
Total	17 (43.6)	22 (56.4)	39				
Kinesthetic							
No	0 (.0)	12 (30.8)	12 (30.8)	2.55	1	.11	.256
Yes	5 (12.8)	22 (56.4)	27 (69.2)				
Total	5 (12.8)	34 (87.2)	39				

Note. * $p < .05$

Table 4 *Perceived vs Actual Learning Preference* (Female, N = 64)

Perceived	Actual		Total	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>	Cramer's V
	No	Yes					
Visual							
No	10 (15.6)	7 (10.9)	17 (26.6)	5.2	1	.022*	.287
Yes	13 (20.3)	34 (53.1)	47 (73.4)				
Total	23 (35.9)	41 (64.1)	64 (100.0)				
Aural							
No	11 (17.2)	15 (23.4)	26 (40.6)	1.0	1	.001*	.409
Yes	3 (4.7)	35 (54.7)	38 (59.4)				
Total	14 (21.9)	50 (78.1)	64 (100.0)				
Read/Write							
No	11 (17.2)	16 (25.0)	27 (42.2)	1.3	1	.249	.144
Yes	10 (15.6)	27 (42.2)	37 (57.8)				
Total	21 (32.8)	43 (67.2)	64 (100.0)				
Kinesthetic							
No	6 (9.4)	20 (31.3)	26 (40.6)	1.8	1	.174	.17
Yes	4 (6.3)	34 (53.1)	38 (59.4)				
Total	10 (15.6)	54 (84.4)	64 (100.0)				

Note. * $p < .05$

Tables 5 and 6 report a chi-square test of independence between perceived and actual learning preference for respondents in lower secondary and upper secondary age groups. In the lower secondary age group, a significant relationship between perceived and actual learning preference was found for the Visual ($\chi^2 = 7.2$, $df = 1$, $p = .007$) preference. 69.4% ($n = 43$) of respondents from this age group correctly identified their learning preference. No other significant relationships between perceived and actual learning preference were found in either age group.

Table 5 *Chi Square Test of Perceived vs Actual Learning Preference* (Lower Secondary, N = 62)

Perceived	Actual		Total	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>	Cramer's V
	No	Yes					
Visual							
No	13 (21.0)	8 (12.9)	21 (33.9)	7.2	1	.007*	.341
Yes	11 (17.7)	30 (48.4)	41 (66.1)				
Total	24 (38.7)	38 (61.3)	62 (100.0)				
Aural							
No	8 (12.9)	19 (30.6)	27 (43.5)	2.17	1	.141	.187
Yes	5 (8.1)	30 (48.4)	35 (56.5)				
Total	13 (21.0)	49 (79.0)	62 (100.0)				
Read/Write							
No	8 (12.9)	13 (21.0)	21 (33.9)	.253	1	.615	.064
Yes	13 (21.0)	28 (45.2)	41 (66.1)				
Total	21 (33.9)	41 (66.1)	62 (100.0)				
Kinesthetic							
No	4 (6.5)	19 (30.6)	23 (37.1)	.043	1	.836	.026
Yes	6 (9.7)	33 (53.2)	39 (62.9)				
Total	10 (16.1)	52 (83.9)	62 (100.0)				

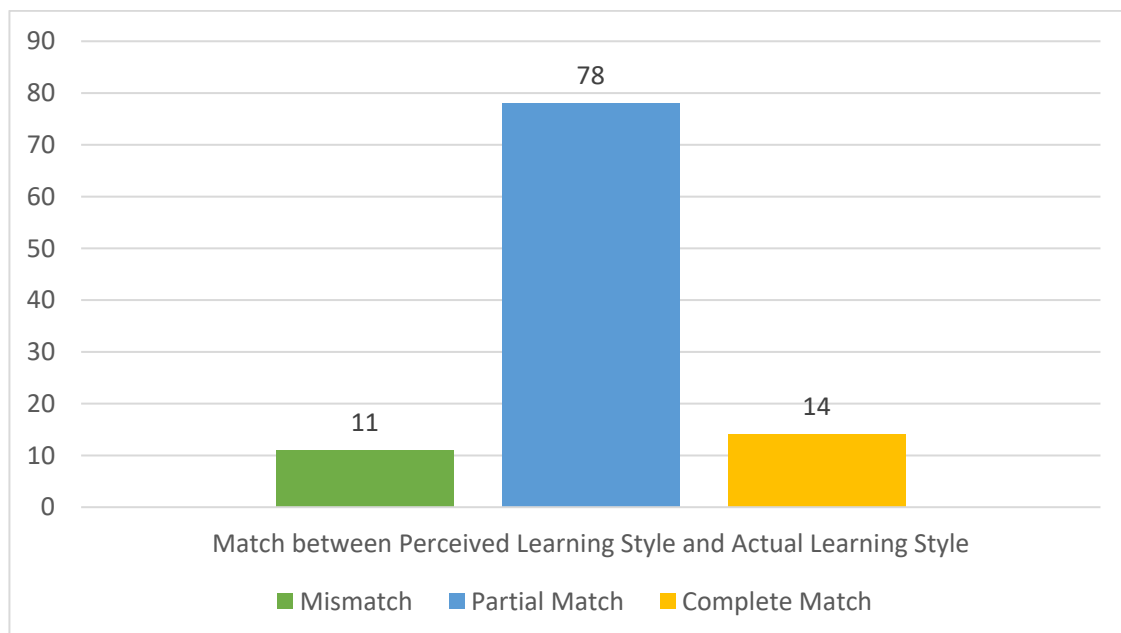
Note. * $p < .05$

Table 6 *Chi Square Test of Perceived vs Actual Learning Preference (Upper Secondary, N = 41)*

Perceived	Actual		Total	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>	Cramer's V
	No	Yes					
Visual							
No	5 (12.2)	4 (9.8)	9 (22.0)	.636	1	.425	.125
Yes	13 (31.7)	19 (46.3)	32 (78.0)				
Total	18 (43.9)	23 (56.1)	41 (100.0)				
Aural							
No	6 (14.6)	7 (17.1)	13 (31.7)	3.62	1	.057	.297
Yes	5 (12.2)	23 (56.1)	28 (68.3)				
Total	11 (26.8)	30 (73.2)	41 (100.0)				
Read/Write							
No	9 (22.0)	9 (22.0)	18 (43.9)	.963	1	.326	.153
Yes	8 (19.5)	15 (36.6)	23 (56.1)				
Total	17 (41.5)	24 (58.5)	41 (100.0)				
Kinesthetic							
No	2 (4.9)	13 (31.7)	15 (36.6)	.029	1	.866	.026
Yes	3 (7.3)	23 (56.1)	26 (63.4)				
Total	5 (12.2)	36 (87.8)	41 (100.0)				

Note. **p* < .05

Figure 2 shows the levels of alignment between overall perceived and actual learning preferences among participants. Most participants (75.7%) had a partial match (at least one match) between perceived and actual learning preferences. 13.6% of respondents had a complete match between perceived and actual learning preference, and 10.7% had a complete mismatch between perceived and actual learning preference.

Figure 2 *Alignment Level between Overall Perceived and Actual Learning Preference*

Note. Numbers indicate frequency.

Discussion

This study explored students' awareness of personal learning preferences based on the VARK model. The results from this study indicated that students' perceptions of their VARK learning preferences do not always match their actual learning preferences.

No significant relationships between perceived learning preference and actual learning preference were found for the Read/Write mode or the Kinesthetic mode, suggesting a low degree of alignment between perceived learning preferences and actual learning preferences for these two modalities. Any matches that did occur between a perceived learning preference and a actual learning preference were likely due to chance and cannot be attributed to the metacognitive awareness of the participant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected for the Read/Write and Kinesthetic modes.

On the other hand, significant relationships between perceived and actual learning preferences were found for the Visual ($p = .011$) and Aural ($p = .025$) modes, suggesting a higher level of cognitive awareness among the participants for these two modes. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected for the Visual and Aural Modes.

Female participants were found to have a slightly higher level of cognitive awareness. Significant relationships between perceived learning preferences were found for the Visual ($p = .022$) and Aural ($p = .001$) modes among female participants; however, no significant relationships were found for any of the modes among male participants.

Among lower secondary students, only the visual mode had a significant ($p = .007$) relationship between perceived and actual learning preferences. Among upper secondary students, no significant relationships were found for any modes, with Aural being the closest to statistical significance ($p = .057$).

Taking the learning preferences of participants as a whole, 89.3% of participants ($n = 92$) had at least partial alignment between perceived learning preference and actual learning preference, with only 13.6% ($n = 14$) having complete alignment. What was more concerning was the fact that over 10% ($n = 11$) of participants had no alignment whatsoever between perceived learning preference and actual learning preference, indicating low levels of metacognitive awareness among some participants. This result was similar to other studies (Breckler et al., 2009; Horton et al., 2012; Ortega-Torres et al., 2018; Rickard et al., 2023) that found low levels of alignment between perceived learning preferences and actual learning preferences.

Differences between gender were found in this study, indicating some differences in metacognitive awareness between male and female participants, with female participants likely to have a higher level of metacognitive awareness. This result aligned with a study by Breckler et al. (2009) which found that female participants were more likely to correctly identify their learning preferences when compared to male participants.

Study participants were selected based on convenience sampling. Due to the non-random nature of the sampling process, the sample was slightly skewed in favor of female and lower secondary students. In addition to the non-random sampling, the sample was only taken from a single institution. These limitations may have reduced the generalizability of the research results in different contexts.

This study found a low to medium metacognitive awareness among secondary school students. As metacognition is related to self-regulation, future research should investigate the factors that result in lower levels of metacognition in students, and ways to effectively improve and encourage metacognitive thinking and self-regulation among students by using models such as VARK.

As this study found some gender differences in metacognitive awareness, further research should also be conducted to investigate the possible factors contributing to these differences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the use of learning styles has been controversial in the literature (Felder, 2020), it remains widespread. Therefore, learning style models should be utilized in a manner that provides the most significant benefit for both student and teacher.

This study offers insight into how theories of learning styles, such as the VARK learning preferences model, can be used to assess students' learning in terms of individual preferences, as well as from a metacognitive point of view.

This study found that students generally had a relatively low level of metacognitive awareness of their learning preferences, especially among male students. This lack of awareness towards one's learning preference may be a factor that hinders academic performance. The use of learning style models such as VARK should be employed to encourage metacognitive reflection and increase self-regulation among students. In doing so, teachers can encourage students to take ownership and control of their learning.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for school administrators, teachers, academic policymakers, and future researchers.

1. Teachers should use learning style frameworks as a starting point to help students reflect on their learning processes. Instead of rigidly grouping students by their preferred learning modality (visual, auditory, reading/writing, kinesthetic), instructors should guide students to explore how different learning strategies work for them in varying contexts.

2. Provide regular training for educators on the practical, research-informed use of learning styles as tools to promote deeper learning and metacognition—not as static labels.

3. Administrators should ensure that using learning style models does not reinforce stereotypes or lead to fixed mindset thinking. It is recommended to focus on flexible, growth-oriented tactics that encourage each student to try out various instructional styles.

4. More research studies should explore how academic performance and learning preference awareness are related to other demographics, such as age, gender, and cultural background. Longitudinal research could also show how metacognitive awareness evolves with targeted intervention.

5. Effectiveness of Integrating VARK with Other Learning Theories: Future research should examine how the VARK model can be combined with other frameworks (e.g., multiple intelligences, cognitive load theory, or self-determination theory) to provide a more holistic approach to student learning.

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Unlocking Potential Through Upskilling: Motivators and Barriers Among Professional Support Staff in Higher Education

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: The increasing complexity of academic institutions highlights the importance of continuous professional development for all staff. However, the motivators and barriers influencing upskilling engagement among administrative and technical staff remain underexplored in existing research. This study examined how these factors shape the professional development experiences of non-teaching staff who play a critical—yet often overlooked—role in supporting institutional adaptability and performance.

Introduction/Background: Grounded in self-determination theory, this study examined how motivational factors and institutional dynamics shape upskilling engagement among administrative and technical staff in higher education. By focusing on this often-overlooked segment of the academic workforce, the study addressed a gap in professional development research and offers practical insights for building institutional capacity in times of rapid change and digital transformation.

Methodology: This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, alongside institutional barriers, influence upskilling engagement among administrative and technical staff. The case focused on a single academic unit within a large public university in Thailand. All 12 full-time staff participated (purposive sampling), representing roles in information technology, finance, general administration, and operations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, guided by self-determination theory constructs and perceived barriers. The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. The researchers independently coded the data, with consensus reached through iterative discussion, providing a rich, context-specific understanding of how motivation and institutional factors interact in practice.

Findings: The study identified three core intrinsic motivators driving engagement in professional development: intellectual curiosity, professional identity, and a lifelong learning orientation. These motivators reflected the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining participation. Extrinsic motivators—including institutional support (particularly funding), career advancement opportunities, and recognition—further enabled engagement by signalling institutional value and support for staff development.

At the same time, several institutional barriers impeded participation. The most frequently cited obstacle was workload pressure, with many staff unable to balance daily responsibilities with development opportunities. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, such as complex funding processes and unclear approval mechanisms, discouraged staff from pursuing available opportunities. In addition, many training programmes were poorly aligned with the specific needs of administrative and technical staff, reducing the perceived value of participation.

The findings highlighted that effective engagement in upskilling arises from the dynamic interplay between personal motivators and institutional conditions. While strong intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can help staff overcome minor challenges, persistent systemic barriers undermine even highly motivated individuals. Institutions that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness—through responsive policies and inclusive practices—are better positioned to foster sustained

engagement and resilience in their workforce. Addressing these barriers is critical to unlocking the full potential of professional development efforts and supporting long-term organisational adaptability.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This study extends self-determination theory by applying it to an underexplored group—administrative and technical staff in higher education—and demonstrates that their motivation to upskill was shaped through the dynamic interaction of personal drivers and institutional structures. It contributes to the body of knowledge by highlighting how institutional environments can either support or suppress the core psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Practically, the findings provide evidence for designing professional development strategies that are inclusive, role-specific, and responsive to the lived experiences of non-teaching staff. By advancing understanding of these dynamics, the study supports institutional efforts to build a motivated and adaptable workforce, contributing to Sustainable Development Goals such as SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). It also offers actionable insights for academic leaders, human resource practitioners, and policymakers seeking to enhance the impact of staff development initiatives within an increasingly complex higher education landscape.

Recommendations: Institutions should adopt development strategies that address both motivational drivers and structural barriers. Key actions include allocating protected time for development, streamlining access to funding, involving staff in program design to ensure relevance, linking upskilling to career progression, and embedding recognition practices. A holistic, inclusive approach can strengthen engagement and resilience as higher education adapts to digital and organisational transformation.

Research Limitations: This study was limited to a single academic unit within one Thai university, which may limit transferability of its findings to other institutional or cultural contexts. Additionally, as a qualitative study based on self-reported interviews, the results reflect participants' subjective experiences and may not capture unspoken influences on engagement in professional development. Further exploration in diverse institutional settings is needed to validate and extend these findings.

Future Research: Future research should examine motivational dynamics across varied institutional and cultural contexts, using comparative or multi-site designs. Mixed-methods and longitudinal approaches are recommended to explore the long-term effects of upskilling on retention, career mobility, and institutional adaptability. Further investigation into the role of leadership, human resource policy, and workplace culture in shaping engagement would also be valuable.

Keywords: *Professional development, motivation, upskilling barriers, higher education*

Introduction

The increasing complexity of academic institutions has heightened the demand for continuous professional development across all staff categories. While faculty development has been well-documented, upskilling for administrative and technical staff—whose roles are critical to institutional effectiveness—remains under-researched (Graham et al., 2013; Yilmaz et al., 2023). These staff members are key to service delivery and institutional transformation, yet their motivational dynamics and the barriers they face in professional growth have received limited scholarly attention.

Professional development is shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation is driven by intellectual curiosity, mastery, and alignment with professional identity (Guay, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic drivers, such as institutional support, career progression, and recognition, further influence engagement—especially in roles where learning is not embedded in daily routines (Harrison et al., 2020; Patre et al., 2024). However, institutional barriers—including workload constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and misaligned training offerings—can undermine these drivers, particularly among support staff (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Novianty & Evita, 2018).

This study explored how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators interact with institutional barriers to shape the upskilling experiences of administrative and technical staff. Moving beyond broad

generalisations, a qualitative case study was used to examine these dynamics within a single academic unit with a diverse range of roles—including IT, finance, operations, and administration (Yin, 2018).

As higher educational institutions undergo rapid technological and structural change, professional development is increasingly critical—not only for teaching excellence, but for institutional adaptability and resilience. However, while much is known about faculty responses to pedagogical change, there is limited understanding of how support staff navigate new expectations, technologies, and competencies. The interaction between motivation and institutional context has important implications for workforce resilience, but existing studies often lack a cohesive framework to capture these dynamics (Guay, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The self-determination theory (SDT) offers a robust framework for understanding these dynamics. Emphasising autonomy, competence, and relatedness, SDT has traditionally informed research on student and faculty motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2015). However, its application to non-teaching academic staff remains limited. This study applied SDT to examine how psychological needs and institutional conditions shaped motivation and upskilling engagement among support staff.

Literature Review

The self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), offers a robust framework for understanding workplace motivation by distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic drivers. It posits that individuals are most engaged when three core psychological needs are fulfilled: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2015; Otoshi & Heffernan, 2011). While SDT has been widely applied in student and faculty contexts, its utility also extends to understanding motivation among administrative and technical staff in higher educational institutions. SDT further highlights how organisational structures—such as job design, access to learning, and recognition—can either support or inhibit motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Henderson & Sowa, 2022).

Autonomy reflects employees' ability to make self-directed choices in professional development—for example, choosing relevant training based on job responsibilities (Gomathi et al., 2023). Constraints such as rigid schedules or centralised course offerings can hinder autonomy and reduce motivation (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002).

Competence refers to the pursuit of mastery and effective performance. For support staff, this often involves skills in digital systems, project management, or operational coordination (Hilty et al., 2019). When training enhances relevant capabilities, perceived competence increases, motivating further learning (Patre et al., 2024).

Relatedness reflects the need to feel valued and connected. For support staff—who may lack visibility in institutional life—recognition and inclusion are vital (Kaefer & Chiviacowsky, 2022; Zumbunn et al., 2014). Inclusive development initiatives, cross-functional learning, and institutional recognition foster a sense of belonging and motivation (Harrison et al., 2020).

In sum, SDT provides a lens to examine how institutions can cultivate conditions that support motivation and engagement. Development programs that promote autonomy, strengthen role-specific competence, and foster belonging are more likely to generate sustained participation (Trenshaw et al., 2016; Vieira & Ortega-Alvarez, 2019). However, these outcomes depend not only on availability but on structural alignment with staff needs (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

While SDT is widely applied in teaching and learning contexts, its relevance remains underexplored among administrative and technical staff despite their integral roles in institutional performance. In this study, SDT was adopted to examine how motivation to upskill among non-teaching staff was shaped by both internal drivers and external institutional conditions. This application extends SDT into the under-researched context of non-academic staff development, highlighting how psychological needs shape engagement beyond traditional teaching roles (Khosha et al., 2024).

Intrinsic Motivators for Educator Upskilling

Intrinsic motivation plays a central role in driving professional development, particularly among administrative and technical staff. Unlike participation based on compliance or external rewards,

intrinsically motivated staff pursue upskilling out of a genuine desire for learning, mastery, and self-improvement (Kusurkar et al., 2011; Trenshaw et al., 2016). According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is fostered when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported in the work environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For non-teaching staff—whose growth pathways are often less formalised—these needs are especially critical, as their roles demand adaptability and evolving expertise. Environments that meet these psychological needs promote deeper engagement and sustained learning (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Guay, 2022).

Intellectual curiosity drives many administrative and technical staff to be proactive about staying current and effective in their fields. Whether through mastering new systems, adopting emerging tools, or improving processes, this pursuit reflects SDT's notion of competence (Chan et al., 2011; Gottfried, 2016). Unlike faculty, whose development paths may be formalised, support staff often initiate their own upskilling. Institutions that recognise and enable this curiosity—through flexible, relevant learning opportunities—foster sustainable engagement (Gomathi et al., 2023).

Professional identity and alignment of values further support intrinsic motivation. When upskilling reinforces an employee's evolving identity and purpose within the institution, engagement deepens. This alignment—linked to lifelong learning and reflective practice—builds intrinsic commitment to one's role and organisation (Pingo et al., 2024). For administrative and technical staff, development tied to personal standards of competence and responsibility fosters motivation, especially when recognition is present (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Guay, 2022).

Lifelong learning orientation commitment drives many non-teaching staff to pursue professional growth beyond formal requirements. This mindset enables them to adapt to changing institutional needs and technological advancements (Chukwuedo et al., 2021; Larson & Rusk, 2011). It also reflects the SDT construct of competence, as individuals derive satisfaction from mastering new skills (Dadiz & Baldwin, 2016; Mustafa & Lleshi, 2024). Institutions that support lifelong learning—through flexible access, peer networks, and recognition—promote engagement and workforce resilience.

Extrinsic Motivators for Professional Development

While intrinsic motivators drive long-term engagement, extrinsic factors often initiate participation in professional development—particularly for administrative and technical staff. These include financial support, career advancement opportunities, and institutional recognition. In SDT terms, external influences can enhance motivation when perceived as autonomy-supportive rather than controlling (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Financial incentives are a key extrinsic motivator, enabling participation in activities such as workshops, certifications, or advanced degrees (Han, 2022; Harrison et al., 2020; Landry et al., 2017; Novianty & Evita, 2018). Aligned with staff values and goals, such incentives can reinforce motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). For instance, administrative staff may seek funding for leadership training, while technical staff may pursue emerging technology certifications (Patre et al., 2024). However, limited budgets and complex approval processes often act as barriers, underscoring the need for streamlined, equitable access (Kunicina et al., 2023).

Career advancement opportunities that link professional development to career progression also motivate staff engagement. Opportunities tied to promotion, job security, or expanded roles foster participation (Artiningsih et al., 2023; Ramasamy & Mengling, 2024). For example, administrative staff may engage in leadership development to prepare for management roles. Clear pathways linking upskilling to career outcomes encourage both participation and satisfaction (Jain et al., 2021; Mackay, 2017).

Moreover, recognition through certifications, awards, and internal or public acknowledgment reinforces engagement and affirms the value of development efforts (Spowart et al., 2019). For non-teaching roles that often lack visibility, such recognition fosters relatedness and morale, promoting a culture of continuous improvement (Hilty et al., 2019; Shagrir, 2023).

Finally, balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivators is an effective professional development strategy that balances intrinsic motivators (such as curiosity and personal fulfilment) with extrinsic supports

(financial incentives, career progression, recognition). Aligning institutional practices with staff aspirations fosters sustained engagement, contributing to both individual growth and organisational performance (Chakravarti, 2023).

Barriers to Academic Staff Upskilling

Despite the presence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, administrative and technical staff often face institutional barriers that constrain participation in professional development. These barriers reflect misalignments between staff needs and organisational practices (Fernet et al., 2016; Pan et al., 2023), and if unaddressed, can erode motivation and create inequities in access to learning.

Workload constraints include heavy operational demands that often limit time for structured learning. Unlike faculty, non-teaching staff typically lack formal development hours or protected time, making upskilling appear optional or disruptive (Patil, 2023). Inflexible schedules and workload pressures reduce participation, particularly for site-dependent roles (Jaquess et al., 2018; Karthikeyan & Ponniah, 2019; Thornby et al., 2023), undermining both motivation and the institutional message that learning is valued (Gomathi et al., 2023). While funding for development may be available, it is often restricted by complex approval processes or limited allocation (Kunicina et al., 2023). Staff who rely on institutional funding to obtain specialized certifications often encounter structural limitations that undermine equitable participation in upskilling. Without embedded and inclusive support systems, such dependencies may inadvertently suppress proactive engagement in continuous learning and widen professional development disparities between employees (Kuforiji, 2025).

Generic or faculty-oriented training often fails to meet specific needs of support staff, who require development in leadership, project management, or digital operations (Patre et al., 2024). Poor alignment reduces participation and the perceived relevance of institutional offerings (Agah et al., 2020). Rigid institutional policies and performance-driven cultures may de-prioritise long-term staff development. A lack of recognition for non-teaching contributions, cultural resistance to change, and siloed structures further undermine motivation (Sormani et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges requires institutional commitment to designing supportive, inclusive learning environments.

However, existing research provides limited insight into how motivation and institutional barriers interact—particularly for administrative and technical staff. Much literature remains faculty-centric, with non-teaching experiences underexplored (Harrison et al., 2020; Patre et al., 2024). Studies often treat motivators and barriers in isolation, lacking an integrated perspective on how institutional structures shape or suppress individual motivation. Furthermore, application of SDT to non-teaching staff remains sparse (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Agah et al., 2020), as do context-specific insights from individual academic units. To address these gaps, this study explored the following questions.

Research Question

How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, in interaction with institutional barriers, shape the upskilling engagement of administrative and technical staff in an academic institution?

Supporting Sub-Questions

1. How do administrative and technical staff experience key intrinsic motivators—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—in their professional development journeys?
2. How do institutional and organisational conditions—including policies, incentives, and cultural barriers—influence staff motivation and engagement in upskilling?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to theory by extending SDT to non-teaching contexts, and to practice by informing the design of inclusive, role-specific development strategies that align staff aspirations with institutional objectives.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative case study design was adopted to explore how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, together with institutional barriers, influence the upskilling engagement of administrative

and technical staff (Stake, 1995). A case study approach enables an in-depth understanding of complex motivation-institution dynamics within a specific context (Yin, 2018). As an inductive, theory-informed inquiry, this design supported a bottom-up understanding of motivation aligned with Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The case focused on a single academic unit within a large public university in Thailand, selected for its diverse mix of non-teaching roles and an active institutional mandate for staff development. Using a purposive sampling strategy, all 12 full-time administrative and technical staff in the unit were recruited. Participants represented varied roles—including IT, operations, finance, and administration—and a range of tenures and responsibilities, ensuring depth and diversity of perspectives (Table 1).

Table 1 *Participants’ Demographic Data*

No.	Participant Code	Gender	Position	Service Years
1	Participant #1	M	General Administration Officer	27 yrs
2	Participant #2	F	Human Resources Officer	31 yrs
3	Participant #3	F	General Administration Officer	34 yrs
4	Participant #4	F	General Administration Officer	28 yrs
5	Participant #5	F	Finance and Accounting Analyst	10 yrs
6	Participant #6	F	General Administration Officer	5 yrs
7	Participant #7	F	General Administration Officer	15 yrs
8	Participant #8	F	Educator	11 yrs
9	Participant #9	F	General Administration Officer	37 yrs
10	Participant #10	F	Finance and Accounting Analyst	5 yrs
11	Participant #11	F	Graphic Designer	2 yrs
12	Participant #12	M	Computer System Analyst	18 yrs

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, well-suited to exploring motivation, institutional experience, and professional development (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interviews (60–90 minutes) were guided by SDT dimensions (autonomy, competence, relatedness), extrinsic incentives (funding, recognition, career mobility), and perceived barriers (workload, bureaucracy, access). Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and returned to participants for validation.

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework. Codes were developed through both theory-driven and emergent analysis. Four overarching themes emerged: Intrinsic Motivation (intellectual curiosity, professional identity, lifelong learning), Extrinsic Motivation (institutional support, recognition, career advancement), Barriers to Upskilling (workloads, bureaucracy, misaligned training), and Interplay of Factors (dynamic relationships between motivation and institutional constraints). Coding was conducted independently by two researchers, with consensus reached through iterative comparison. Memos and audit trails ensured analytical rigour.

Ethical approval was granted by the institution’s ethics committee. Participants were fully informed of the study purpose and confidentiality measures, and all data were anonymised and securely stored. Voluntary participation and withdrawal rights fostered trust and openness. The research design also incorporated reflexivity to acknowledge the positionality of the lead researcher, who holds an administrative leadership role within the institution. This insider perspective contributed to contextual understanding, but also required conscious management of potential bias, which was addressed through memo writing and peer debriefing. Data saturation was assessed iteratively during analysis and was considered to have been achieved by the twelfth interview, as no substantially new themes or codes emerged, and participant perspectives showed sufficient diversity and depth to address the research questions (Guest et al., 2006).

Findings and Discussion

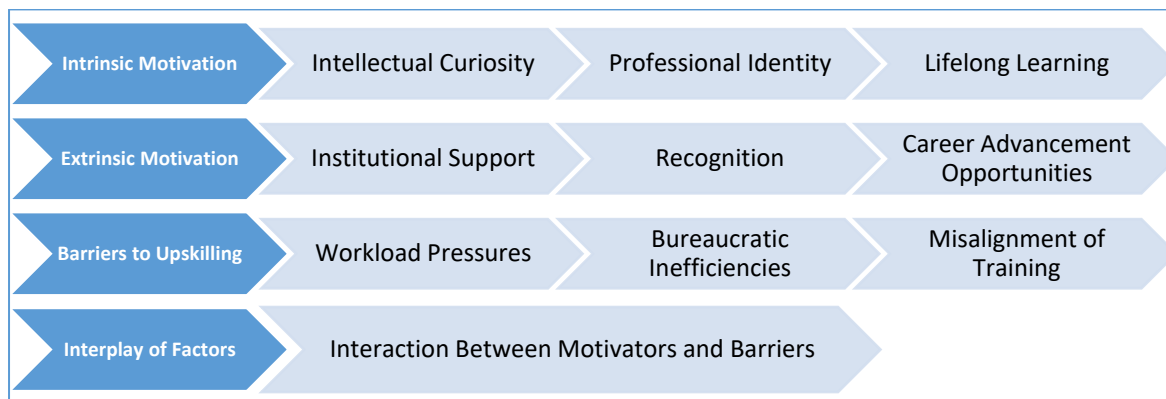
The findings presented here are context-specific yet offer insights that may be transferable to comparable higher educational environments. Rather than aiming for statistical generalisation, the

richness of qualitative accounts provides a foundation for interpreting motivational dynamics and institutional conditions in similar contexts. The first theme, Intrinsic Motivation, captured how internal drivers such as curiosity, identity, and personal growth shaped participants' engagement with professional development.

Intrinsic Motivators Driving Professional Growth

Three key intrinsic motivators shaping administrative and technical staff engagement in professional development were identified in this study: intellectual curiosity, professional identity, and a commitment to lifelong learning. These themes directly reflect Self-Determination Theory's (SDT) core psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—and support Sub-RQ1 on how internal drivers influence upskilling behaviours; they are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Thematic Map of Motivators, Barriers, and Their Interplay*



Participants described a proactive desire to stay current and deepen expertise in their functional areas. For many, this intellectual curiosity was linked to personal pride and professional relevance:

My motivation to upskill comes from wanting to remain an expert in my field; it's about personal pride and professional relevance (Participant #4).

This aligns with SDT's concept of competence—the need to feel capable and effective in one's role (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Slemp et al., 2020). Curiosity-driven learning was also tied to adaptability in a fast-evolving environment:

Learning new skills keeps me sharp and allows me to feel competent in a rapidly changing work environment (Participant #7).

Upskilling also reinforced a strong sense of professional identity. Participants viewed learning as a way to remain faithful to their roles and responsibilities:

It's about being true to the responsibilities and expectations of my role (Participant #2).

Upskilling allows me to contribute more effectively to my team and the institution as a whole, which gives me a sense of purpose (Participant #8).

A strong orientation toward lifelong learning also emerged across the participant pool. For many, this was not only a means of maintaining competence, but an intrinsic expression of growth:

Lifelong learning is a personal commitment; it ensures I'm always ready to meet new challenges in my role (Participant #9).

I don't just upskill for immediate rewards; it's about the satisfaction of knowing I'm growing as a professional (Participant #11).

Together, these patterns suggested that intrinsic motivation was central to sustained upskilling—especially when development opportunities support self-directed learning, role alignment, and psychological growth. Designing professional development that is intellectually challenging, affirms

role identity, and supports learning as a personal journey can foster long-term engagement and strengthen institutional resilience.

Extrinsic Motivators Driving Engagement

External motivators also played an important role in encouraging administrative and technical staff to engage in professional development. These included institutional support, access to funding, career advancement opportunities, and recognition. While intrinsic motivation sustained long-term engagement, these external factors often initiated participation and signalled institutional investment in staff development (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Participants consistently emphasised the importance of institutional support—particularly through financial assistance:

The institution's willingness to fund training programs makes a huge difference; it shows that they value our growth and development (Participant #3).

Without the funding... it would be challenging to attend external training sessions or purchase necessary materials (Participant #6).

These findings supported prior research highlighting funding as both an incentive and an institutional commitment (Han, 2022; Harrison et al., 2020).

Career advancement also featured prominently as a motivating factor. Participants linked new skills to internal promotion, expanded responsibilities, and enhanced professional standing:

Upskilling has opened doors for me to take on more challenging roles, which is incredibly rewarding both personally and professionally (Participant #9).

Knowing that upskilling improves my chances for promotion motivates me to invest in my growth (Participant #5).

These insights echo prior findings that clear career pathways encourage greater engagement in development (Chakravarti, 2023).

Recognition also emerged as a powerful driver. For many, being acknowledged reinforced a sense of belonging and value, especially in behind-the-scenes roles. As one participant reflected:

When the institution publicly recognizes my efforts, it validates my hard work and motivates me to keep learning (Participant #8);

Being recognized for my skills and efforts makes me feel valued as part of the institution (Participant #10).

This aligns with SDT's concept of relatedness—where social acknowledgement fosters stronger engagement (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Lebzar & Dean, 2024).

Taken together, these findings underscore that while intrinsic motivation drove personal investment, extrinsic factors also played a critical enabling and reinforcing role. Institutions aiming to strengthen upskilling engagement should ensure that development opportunities are supported through accessible funding, career-linked pathways, and inclusive recognition systems. Aligning this external support with staff aspirations contributes to a more equitable and motivating environment for sustained professional growth.

Systemic Barriers Hindering Engagement

Despite strong intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, administrative and technical staff faced persistent institutional barriers that hindered participation in professional development. These included workload pressures, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and misalignment of training opportunities—reflecting structural gaps between institutional policies and staff experience. Lack of time was the most immediate obstacle cited by participants.

Balancing daily responsibilities with professional development is almost impossible: there's just not enough time to do both effectively (Participant #6).

High service demands, especially in operational roles, left little room for flexible scheduling. Without adjustments such as protected time or workload planning, development activities were frequently deprioritised. These findings echo calls for integrating learning opportunities into regular work structures to ensure feasibility (Thornby et al., 2023).

Administrative inefficiencies further discouraged participation. Participants described lengthy forms, unclear eligibility, and opaque approval processes:

The processes to access training funds are so complicated that it sometimes feels easier to give up (Participant #6).

Such bureaucratic barriers undermine autonomy by stripping control from staff and creating unnecessary obstacles to learning access (Kuforiji, 2025). Many also highlighted the poor alignment between available training and actual job needs.

Most of the available training programs don't address the practical skills I need for my day-to-day work (Participant #11).

These findings point to a critical need for institutional reform in both mindset and mechanisms. Without rethinking how time, access, and content are managed, professional development risks becoming an aspirational concept rather than an achievable reality. Institutions aiming to foster meaningful upskilling must address these systemic constraints alongside motivational strategies—ensuring that development is not only encouraged, but also structurally supported and role-relevant.

Interplay of Factors

While intrinsic and extrinsic motivators encouraged engagement in professional development, their impact was strongly shaped—positively or negatively—by institutional conditions. This dynamic relationship between personal motivation and structural support directly addressed the main research question. Institutional support helped staff overcome some barriers, as one participant explained:

Knowing the institution values my growth by providing funding and recognition encourages me to pursue more training opportunities, even with the challenges (Participant #9).

This was aligned with Gagné and Deci's (2005) view that external support can reinforce intrinsic motivation when perceived as autonomy supportive. Recognition and financial assistance often helped sustain engagement, even when other constraints were present (Lebzar & Dean, 2024). Conversely, many participants reported that systemic limitations—such as lack of funding, inflexible schedules, or misaligned training—dampened even strong initial motivation (Kunicina et al., 2023; Patre et al., 2024). This reflects SDT's core argument: when basic psychological needs are thwarted by institutional structures, motivation is undermined (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sormani et al., 2022).

Overall, these findings suggest that motivation alone is insufficient to sustain participation in professional development. While strong motivators help offset minor barriers, persistent structural constraints erode engagement over time. Aligning development opportunities with both staff needs and institutional delivery mechanisms remains critical for fostering sustained participation (Guay, 2022; Gomathi et al., 2023). These insights are summarised in Table 2, which integrates the relationship between themes, relevance to the research questions, and practical significance—offering a foundation for a subsequent discussion on theoretical and managerial implications.

Conclusion

This study examined how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, in interaction with institutional barriers, shaped the upskilling engagement of administrative and technical staff in an academic institution. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and using a qualitative case study approach, the research highlighted the dynamic interplay between individual drivers and organisational structures in professional development. The findings demonstrated that intrinsic motivators—such as intellectual curiosity, professional identity, and lifelong learning orientation—were critical to sustaining engagement over time. Extrinsic factors, including institutional support, career

advancement pathways, and recognition, further enable participation. However, persistent institutional barriers—such as workload constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and poorly aligned training—continue to erode engagement and disrupt the fulfilment of core psychological needs.

Table 2 Summary of Themes, Sub-Themes, Illustrative Quotes, Research Questions Addressed, & Practical Implications

Theme	Sub-Theme	Example Quote	RQs Addressed	Practical Implications
Intrinsic Motivation	Intellectual Curiosity	<i>My motivation to upskill comes from wanting to remain an expert in my field; it's about personal pride and professional relevance. (Participant #4)</i>	Sub-RQ1	Foster intrinsic motivation by embedding intellectually stimulating and domain-relevant content into upskilling programs that align with staff curiosity and self-driven growth.
	Professional Identity	<i>Upskilling allows me to contribute more effectively to my team and the institution as a whole, which gives me a sense of purpose. (Participant #8)</i>	Sub-RQ1	Professional development programs should align with staff roles and aspirations to enhance their sense of purpose. Reinforce role clarity and purpose by aligning professional development opportunities with staff aspirations and evolving responsibilities.
	Lifelong Learning	<i>Lifelong learning is a personal commitment; it ensures I'm always ready to meet new challenges in my role. (Participant #9)</i>	Sub-RQ1	Promote a culture of lifelong learning by integrating flexible and future-focused training opportunities.
Extrinsic Motivation	Institutional Support	<i>The institution's willingness to fund training programs makes a huge difference; it shows that they value our growth and development. (Participant #3)</i>	Sub-RQ2	Increase access to funding and create transparent processes to sustain engagement in professional development.
	Recognition	<i>When the institution publicly recognizes my efforts, it validates my hard work and motivates me to keep learning. (Participant #8)</i>	Sub-RQ2	Implement formal recognition programs to boost morale and encourage continuous learning.
	Career Advancement Opportunities	<i>Upskilling opens pathways to better roles and responsibilities within the institution, which is a big motivator for me. (Participant #5)</i>	Sub-RQ2	Link professional development to tangible career advancement opportunities to drive participation.
Barriers to Upskilling	Workload Pressures	<i>Balancing daily responsibilities with professional development is almost impossible: there's just not enough time to do both effectively. (Participant #6)</i>	Sub-RQ2	Allocate dedicated time for professional development to mitigate workload challenges.
	Bureaucratic Inefficiencies	<i>The processes to access training funds are so complicated that it sometimes feels easier to give up. (Participant #6)</i>	Sub-RQ2	Streamline administrative processes to ensure accessibility and reduce frustration among staff.
	Misalignment of Training	<i>Most of the available training programs don't address the practical skills I need for my day-to-day work. (Participant #11)</i>	Sub-RQ2	Co-design training programs with staff input to align offerings with their specific needs.
Interplay of Factors	Interaction Between Motivators and Barriers	<i>Knowing the institution values my growth by providing funding and recognition encourages me to pursue more training opportunities, even with the challenges. (Participant #9)</i>	Main RQ	Adopt a holistic approach by balancing motivators and reducing barriers to create a supportive environment.

This study provides clear evidence that individual motivation alone is insufficient to drive sustained participation in professional development. Instead, successful engagement requires an intentional alignment between staff needs and institutional systems. Without such alignment, even highly motivated staff may disengage. Addressing this challenge demands an integrated strategy—combining targeted design of development opportunities, inclusive institutional practices, and systematic removal of structural barriers—to ensure that professional development is both accessible and impactful. In light of the study’s insights, institutions should adopt development strategies that address both motivational drivers and structural barriers by allocating protected time for learning, simplifying funding access, involving staff in program design, linking training to career progression, and embedding recognition practices to sustain engagement and institutional resilience.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

This study offers several key contributions to both theory and practice. The research extends the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to the underexplored context of non-teaching staff in higher education. While prior SDT research has focused largely on faculty or student populations, this study demonstrated that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are equally relevant psychological needs shaping professional development among administrative and technical staff. Moreover, the study contributes an integrated perspective by showing how these needs are either supported or suppressed by institutional systems—addressing a gap in SDT literature, which often isolates individual motivation from structural context.

For academic institutions, the findings highlight the need to move beyond generic or one-size-fits-all approaches to professional development. Programmes should be designed with the specific functions, motivations, and career aspirations of non-teaching staff in mind. Relevance, flexibility, and equitable access to funding are critical in fostering engagement. In addition, recognition, career-linked pathways, and inclusive institutional practices are essential in sustaining motivation. By addressing systemic barriers—such as workload constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies—institutions can better align development opportunities with staff needs, thereby enhancing both individual growth and organisational resilience. These contributions also align with broader institutional goals related to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), by promoting inclusive access to development and fostering sustainable career pathways for all staff categories.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides rich insights into the upskilling experiences of administrative and technical staff, its scope is limited to a single academic unit within one institution. As such, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalised. However, the depth of contextual detail allows for transferability to similar higher educational environments, particularly those facing comparable organisational and developmental challenges. Additionally, as a qualitative study based on self-reported interviews, the results reflect subjective experiences and may not fully capture unspoken or unconscious influences on engagement.

Future research could build on these findings through multi-institutional or cross-cultural studies, exploring how varying organisational structures and cultures shape staff motivation and development. A mixed-methods approach could further strengthen the evidence base by combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures—such as participation rates, learning outcomes, and career mobility.

Longitudinal research is particularly needed to assess the long-term impacts of upskilling on performance, retention, and institutional adaptability. Further exploration of how emerging factors—such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and hybrid work models—reshape staff development needs would also extend the relevance of this research. These directions offer opportunities to refine theoretical frameworks like SDT and support the design of more resilient, inclusive development strategies in higher education.

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The Fall of the Damsel in Distress and the Rise of the Modern Heroines: An Archetypal-Gynocriticist Study of Select Contemporary Epic Fantasy Novels

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study examines the evolving representation of female heroines in contemporary epic fantasy, addressing the long-standing marginalization of women in the genre. While earlier works often confined women to roles such as the “damsel in distress” or passive companions, recent novels have begun to subvert these tropes by presenting heroines who are complex, empowered, and central to the narrative. Using Elaine Showalter’s gynocriticism and Carl Jung’s archetypal criticism, this paper investigates how female protagonists in Samantha Shannon’s (2019) *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (2019), Leigh Bardugo’s (2012) *Shadow and Bone*, and Alexandra Bracken’s (2021) *Lore* reflect newly emerging constructs of womanhood. In doing so, it identifies shared traits and interprets the cultural and literary implications of these portrayals within the 21st-century epic fantasy tradition.

Introduction/Background: Historically, women have been confined to domestic roles and excluded from education and public life, their subordination reinforced by social norms and even Darwinian ideology (Beck, 2016; Bergman, 2002; Sultana, 2011). Literature mirrored this hierarchy: classical and early epic fantasy privileged male heroes, reducing women to damsels or supporting figures (Wolford, 2011). Recent feminist writers, however, have subverted these tropes, introducing heroines who lead, fight, and redefine power—paralleling the increasing prominence of women in contemporary literature (Thomas-Corr, 2021). By analyzing how these more recent works construct female protagonists, this study highlights the paradigmatic shift from male-centered heroism to empowered female archetypes, positioning itself as a pioneering contribution at the intersection of feminist criticism and fantasy studies.

Methodology: This study employed a **descriptive-qualitative design**, which is well-suited for interpreting rather than measuring literary texts. It explored how female protagonists in selected 21st-century epic fantasy novels shift from the “damsel in distress” archetype to empowered heroines. Following Flick (2014), qualitative inquiry in literature enables the reconstruction of meaning and recognition of cultural patterns.

Corpus and Scope: The primary texts were three contemporary epic fantasy novels by women: *The Priory of the Orange Tree* by Samantha Shannon (2019), *Shadow and Bone* by Leigh Bardugo (2012), and *Lore* by Alexandra Bracken (2021). Selection criteria included: (1) women authors active in the 21st century, (2) English-language epic fantasy, and (3) central female protagonists. The scope was limited to heroines in these novels.

Data Collection: The authors surveyed and selected novels based on specific criteria, conducted close readings to extract passages that highlighted heroines’ traits, roles, and struggles, noted instances where portrayals aligned with or challenged archetypes, and analyzed the findings through gynocriticism and archetypal criticism.

Data Analysis: The analysis identified central heroines and their archetypal roles, compared similarities and differences across texts, and interpreted the findings through feminist discourse, highlighting the evolving role of heroines in epic fantasy.

Findings: These include Archetypal Subversion, where characters such as Ead (Huntress/Sage) and Lore (Huntress) resist traditional constructions of passive femininity by embodying both physical prowess and intellectual authority. Similarly, Sabran IX (Queen) and Alina Starkov (Maiden → Unwilling Hero) dramatize the conflict between socially prescribed roles and the pursuit of individual self-actualization. Philosophical Resonance shows that the heroines engage with deeper philosophical paradigms. Socratic ideals of wisdom and self-examination inform the trajectories of Ead and Athena. At the same time, essentialist notions of predetermined destiny surface in Sabran and Alina—though both characters ultimately contest and negotiate these constraints. Narrative Agency shows that in contrast to classical damsels confined to reactive roles, these heroines serve as narrative catalysts. Through deliberate choice, rebellion, and leadership, they propel their stories forward, embodying feminist redefinitions of agency in 21st-century epic fantasy.

Contribution/Impact on Society: This study underscores how contemporary epic fantasy serves as a transformative space for reimagining gender roles, positioning heroines not as passive figures but as agents of autonomy, resilience, and leadership. Beyond literature, such representations foster reader empowerment, encourage critical conversations on gender equality, and enrich cultural perceptions of women in leadership and heroism. Importantly, these insights hold value for curriculum reform, inviting educators to reframe literary study around inclusive narratives that better reflect the diversity and dynamism of contemporary society.

Recommendations:

1. For Authors and Publishers: Expand the spectrum of female archetypes beyond the “warrior woman,” incorporating intersectional identities (race, class, sexuality, disability) to reflect broader lived realities.
2. For Educators: Incorporate feminist fantasy into curricula alongside male-centered epics to empower readers and foster dialogue on equity, diversity, and identity.
3. For Scholars: Examine epic fantasy heroines through intersectional lenses—feminist, postcolonial, and queer—to reveal how power and identity are negotiated.

Research Limitation: Focus on three novels limits generalizability; broader genre surveys are needed. Gynocriticism and Jungian archetypes may overlook postmodern or non-Western feminist frameworks. Examining post-2010 works excludes earlier feminist fantasy pioneers.

Future Research:

1. Conduct cross-cultural studies comparing female constructs in Western and non-Western epic fantasies, revealing how cultural contexts shape the roles of heroines.
2. Explore historical trajectories, tracing continuities and ruptures between classical heroines and their modern re-imaginings.
3. Undertake reception-based analyses of how diverse readerships interpret, relate to, or resist empowered heroines in fantasy.
4. Examine philosophical frameworks (Socratic, Essentialist, Existentialist) to assess how female characters embody or disrupt dominant worldviews.
5. Extend Showalter’s notion of the “female phase” by mapping its development across contemporary fantasy, especially works authored by women and other marginalized voices.

Keywords: *Women, gender studies, women’s status, empowerment, leadership*

Introduction

Throughout history, women have been perceived as inferior to men. This statement is supported by Beck (2016), who contends that before the Industrial Revolution, women were assigned traditional duties like sewing and mending clothes, as well as frequently contributing to running the farm's business and raising children. Various feminist perspectives have also dissected this systemic oppression, attributing it to factors ranging from unjust discrimination to male control over women's sexual and reproductive abilities (Jaggar, 1988).

Darwinian ideology further exacerbated the perception of female inferiority by positing that men faced substantially more selective pressures than females, particularly in the areas of warfare, food, mate competition, and attire (Bergman, 2002). This belief system reinforced the notion that women lacked mental fortitude and were incapable of thinking for themselves, making a woman's dominant social function that of a housewife (Sekścińska et al., 2016). Despite these historical constraints, the status of women has gradually evolved, spurred by social changes and movements advocating for gender equality. Today, women exercise greater autonomy and choice than in previous centuries.

Fantasy has a history of giving women character roles that are stereotypical of their gender (Wolford, 2011). In numerous fictional literary genres, women often assume the role of the damsel in distress. Otherwise, they will most likely play a supporting role. Seldom are women shown as powerful individuals; instead, they are frequently depicted as images of female virtue and beauty. However, contemporary authors, particularly those writing from feminist perspectives, have begun to challenge these conventions by centering their narratives on strong, complex female characters, such as Karen Francisco's (2010) *Naermyth*, K. S. Villosio's (2019) *The Wolf of Oren-Yaro*, and Elisa A. Bonnin's (2022) *Dauntless*.

Considering these developments, this research paper embarked on a gynocritical investigation of modern heroines in epic fantasy literature, focusing on selected works, namely, Samantha Shannon's (2019) *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, Leigh Bardugo's (2012) *Shadow and Bone*, and Alexandra Bracken's (2021) *Lore*. By integrating the theoretical frameworks of Elaine Showalter's (1979) Gynocriticism and Carl Jung's Archetypal Criticism, this study aims to shed light on the paradigmatic shift from male-centered hero archetypes to the emergence of female heroines in contemporary epic fantasy literature.

This paper positions itself as a pioneering contribution to the study of epic fantasy and aims to guide future investigations. By blending Gynocriticism's focus on women's experiences and Archetypal Criticism's exploration of universal symbols and motifs, this research offers a nuanced understanding of the evolving portrayal of heroines in epic fantasy literature. Through this interdisciplinary approach, this study seeks to illuminate uncharted paths for future scholars interested in interrogating gender dynamics within the realm of epic fantasy literature.

Literature Review

Women, Heroines, and Gynocriticism

The representation of women in literature has long been a focal point of feminist criticism. Eyvazi et al. (2017), drawing on Showalter's gynocriticism, emphasized how female literary production can be understood across three stages: the feminine, the feminist, and the female. Their study of Iranian women's novels illustrates how women writers articulate oppression while also carving out new subjectivities within patriarchal contexts. Similar approaches in Western contexts have also demonstrated the ways female authors engage with questions of dependence, resistance, and redefinition of women's roles.

Showalter's gynocriticism has been foundational in re-centering women's voices in literary criticism, moving away from male-dominated paradigms. Studies of women's writing across diverse traditions (Putri, 2014; Cabeliza, 2016; Mallick, 2019; Hartanto & Roifa, 2020) converge on the insight that women writers often foreground embodied experience, cultural marginalization, and strategies of resistance. This body of research informs the present study's focus on heroines in contemporary epic fantasy as figures who negotiate and challenge patriarchal archetypes.

Female Representation in Fantasy and Popular Culture

The epic fantasy genre has historically been dominated by male heroes and narratives (Bernardez, 2020). However, feminist scholars note a growing subversion of these conventions. Bernardez (2020) argued that *The Priory of the Orange Tree* reconfigures the epic narrative by situating women at the center of both heroic and mythic roles. Similarly, Schanoes (2014) situated revisionist fantasy within the broader feminist project of rewriting myths and fairy tales to destabilize gendered stereotypes,

while Fabrizi (2016) highlighted the philosophical richness of fantasy in confronting questions of morality, justice, and social identity—issues now increasingly embodied in female protagonists.

Parallel developments in popular culture have further illustrated this shift. Brown (2015) charted how female action heroines have evolved beyond the trope of weaponized sexuality into figures of direct physical power. Hentges (2018) and Wright (2016) emphasized how *The Hunger Games* and similar Young Adult dystopias redefined mainstream expectations of heroines as independent agents of change. Madrid (2016) likewise pointed to comic book heroines who challenge reductive stereotypes, while Streiff and Dundes (2017) read *Frozen*'s Elsa as emblematic of a heroine whose autonomy disrupts traditional romance-centered narratives.

Archetypes, Philosophy, and Female Agency

Beyond representation, scholars have interrogated the archetypal and philosophical dimensions of heroines. Talairach-Vielmas (2016) demonstrated how Victorian sensational fiction and fairy tales negotiated femininity through the interplay of fantasy and realism, while Nouri and Mohammadi (2015) foreground Angela Carter's feminist rewritings as critiques of patriarchal constraints. These works underscore the extent to which archetypes can be reimagined as sites of resistance.

Traditional philosophy also provides a lens for considering heroines' moral and existential trajectories. Studies on Socratic and existential thought (Futter, 2013; Sahin, 2018; Shanahan, 2018; Smith, 2016; Zervas, 2018) highlight themes of wisdom, authenticity, and the pursuit of truth. While not directly situated in fantasy literature, such frameworks are useful in examining heroines whose journeys embody philosophical inquiry into selfhood, agency, and ethical action.

Gaps and Implications for Contemporary Epic Fantasy

Existing scholarship demonstrates a robust interest in women's writing, feminist retellings, and the evolution of female representation in literature and popular culture. However, a clear research gap remains regarding the specific development of female heroines in epic fantasy literature, particularly in the 21st century and in works authored by women. While the studies of Carter, Collins, Rowling, and Shannon have addressed aspects of this transformation, little sustained attention has been given to tracing how heroines shift from the "damsel in distress" archetype to empowered figures of agency and leadership across contemporary epic fantasy.

The present study seeks to contribute to this discourse by analyzing the heroines of *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, *Shadow and Bone*, and *Lore* through gynocritical and archetypal frameworks. In doing so, it highlights the ways modern epic fantasy negotiates gendered traditions, reconfigures archetypes, and reflects broader cultural shifts in the understanding of female agency.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative design, appropriate for examining literary texts where the goal is not measurement but interpretation. The design enables an exploration of how female protagonists in selected 21st-century epic fantasy novels transition from the conventional "*damsel in distress*" archetype to modern representations of empowered heroines. Following Flick (2014), qualitative inquiry in literary studies allows for the reconstruction of meanings from within the texts and the recognition of emerging patterns and cultural implications.

Corpus and Scope

The primary texts analyzed are three contemporary epic fantasy novels authored by women: *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (2019) by Samantha Shannon, *Shadow and Bone* (2012) by Leigh Bardugo, and *Lore* (2021) by Alexandra Bracken. These novels were selected using the following criteria:

1. Authorship: written by women authors who are active in the 21st century.
2. Genre: epic fantasy novels published in English.
3. Characterization: featuring female protagonists as central figures.

The scope of the study was limited to the representation of heroines in these three novels. Other works by the authors or within the broader fantasy genre were excluded.

Data Collection Procedures

The study followed a systematic process:

1. Text Selection: A survey of contemporary epic fantasy novels was conducted to identify works meeting the inclusion criteria.
2. Close Reading: The selected novels were read carefully to extract relevant passages concerning the heroines' characterization, roles, and struggles.
3. Textual Analysis: Descriptive notes were made on instances where the heroines' traits aligned with or challenged classical archetypes.
4. Theoretical Application: The textual evidence was examined through the dual lens of gynocriticism and archetypal criticism.

Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. Identification: Determining the central female protagonists in each novel and situating them within archetypal categories.
2. Comparison: Examining similarities and differences across the heroines' representations in relation to female experience and traditional philosophy.
3. Interpretation: Relating the findings to broader feminist discourse and contemporary literary production, highlighting implications for the evolving role of heroines in 21st-century epic fantasy.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines contemporary epic fantasy novels through the lenses of Elaine Showalter's *Gynocriticism* (1979) and Carl Jung's *Archetypal Criticism*. The framework synthesizes these approaches to explore how female characters in epic fantasy transcend traditional gender roles and embody diverse heroic archetypes.

Elaine Showalter's concept of Gynocriticism emphasizes the significance of discussing women's writers from female viewpoints (Putri, 2014). Initially introduced in Showalter's (1979) *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, Gynocriticism investigates the historical, thematic, and structural elements of women's writing, aiming to understand literary works by female authors within their unique context of female subjectivity and experience (Mambrol, 2016; Plate, 2016; Putri, 2014).

Chandra (2022) claimed that according to Showalter, Gynocriticism encompasses three phases of female literary development: 1) Feminine Phase (1840—1880) where early female authors, such as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, wrote in a male-dominated literary world where their works were often marginalized; 2) Feminist Phase (1880—1920) where women's writing began to assert independence from male influences, representing a burgeoning feminist identity; and 3) Female Phase (1920—present) which emphasizes an inward exploration of authentic female selfhood, celebrating women's unique experiences and contributions to literature without needing to compare them to male norms. Therefore, this study applies Gynocriticism to contemporary epic fantasy novels to analyze how female characters embody and challenge traditional gender roles, emphasizing their roles as producers of textual meaning rather than as subjects of patriarchal critique (Barad, 2013).

In addition to that, Carl Jung's *Archetypal Criticism* offers a complementary perspective, focusing on universal patterns and symbols in literature that emerge from the collective unconscious (Delahoyde, n.d.; Vogler, 2007). Jung's framework includes archetypes specific to women and heroes, which serve as foundational structures for character analysis; please see Table 1 for details.

Table 1 *Archetypes Specific to Women and Heroes*

Archetypes of Women	Archetypes of Heroes
1. Lover: Embodies intimacy, creativity, and enchantment. 2. Huntress: Represents autonomy and a warrior spirit. 3. Maiden: Symbolizes insight, imagination, and potential for growth. 4. Sage: Reflects wisdom, achievement, and discernment. 5. Mother: Connects to nurturing, creativity, and relational warmth. 6. Mystic: Represents freedom, tranquility, and mystery. 7. Queen: Symbolizes leadership, confidence, and prosperity.	1. Willing Hero: Boldly embraces adventure without reservations. 2. Unwilling Hero: Hesitant and requires external motivation. 3. Anti-Hero: Sympathetic but morally ambiguous, often challenging societal norms. 4. Rebel/Tragic Hero: Flawed and ultimately overcome by personal demons. 5. Group-Oriented Hero: Begins as part of a group but undergoes a transformative solo journey. 6. Loner Hero: Starts and ends in solitude, often engaging with a group temporarily. 7. Catalyst Hero: Influences change in others without undergoing significant personal transformation.

This research utilizes Jung's archetypes to explore the evolution of female characters in epic fantasy, particularly how they navigate the hero's journey and embody diverse heroic qualities. Jungian analysis helps identify the transformative paths female characters undertake, highlighting their agency, resilience, and quest for self-discovery.

In addition to Gynocriticism and Archetypal Criticism, the study also incorporates traditional philosophical frameworks to deepen the analysis of female characters' belief systems, moral orientations, and existential inquiries (Pop, 2014). Philosophical paradigms such as Socratic thought, essentialism, and existentialism provide a broader intellectual context, enabling a more refined understanding of characters' actions, choices, and development. By integrating these philosophical perspectives, the research aims to reveal how contemporary epic fantasy novels reflect and engage with foundational philosophical ideas, enhancing the comprehension of female protagonists' moral landscapes and guiding principles.

Statement of the Problem

In traditional epic fantasy literature, female characters have often been confined to the role of the *damsel in distress*, serving primarily as passive figures dependent on male heroes. However, recent works of contemporary fantasy, particularly those authored by women, depict heroines who challenge and subvert this archetype. Despite the growing visibility of such heroines, there remains limited scholarly inquiry into how these female characters are constructed, how they embody archetypes, and what their representations imply for contemporary understandings of gender in fantasy literature. This study addresses this gap by examining the portrayal of heroines in Samantha Shannon's *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (2019), Leigh Bardugo's *Shadow and Bone* (2012), and Alexandra Bracken's *Lore* (2021).

Research Objectives

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To analyze the representation of female protagonists in the selected epic fantasy novels using gynocriticism and archetypal criticism.
2. To identify the shared characteristics of the heroines in terms of female representation and experience.
3. To interpret the cultural and literary implications of these heroines' portrayals in the context of 21st-century epic fantasy.

Research Questions

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What characteristics are commonly shared by the heroines in the selected epic fantasy novels in terms of female representation and/or experience?
2. What are the implications of these shared characteristics for the 21st century and the development of the contemporary epic fantasy genre?

Results and Discussion

Similarities of Epic Fantasy Heroines in Terms of: Female Representation and/or Experience

In examining the evolving representation of female heroines in 21st-century epic fantasy literature, it becomes evident that these characters have transcended the traditional "damsel in distress" trope. This section examines the representation and experiences of the heroines in the three analyzed books by categorizing them into Jungian archetypes.

Analysis of Ead Duryan in Samantha Shannon's The Priory of the Orange Tree (2019)

Women Archetype/s. Ead Duryan exemplifies the **huntress and sage archetypes**. The huntress, according to Creedon (1994), is characterized by her physical abilities and independence, which Ead displays throughout the novel. Her mission to protect Queen Sabran IX and determine the queen's lineage showcases her combat prowess and strategic thinking.

However, Ead was already aware that her loyalty was to The Mother, Cleolind, on whom her ideas and beliefs were based. This reinforces her sage archetype as it emphasizes her wisdom and ability to separate personal emotions from her duties. This is illustrated in the following lines: "*All I do, I do for the Mother. To glorify her name.*" (Shannon, 2019, p. 511). Despite her love for Sabran, Ead prioritizes her responsibilities to The Priory, demonstrating her commitment to her principles.

Hero Archetype/s. Ead's character aligns with the archetypes of the anti-hero, catalyst hero, loner hero, and group-oriented hero. Bernárdez (2020) argues that Ead's upbringing in a matriarchal society renders her role as a hero natural rather than gender specific. Her values and beliefs, which differ from the Western Inysh, position her as an anti-hero or outlaw. Ead's solitary journey to protect the queen and her covert religious adherence illustrate her as a loner hero. Her catalytic influence is seen in her impact on others, such as Loth, Meg, and Sabran IX.

Analysis of Tané in Samantha Shannon's The Priory of the Orange Tree (2019)

Women Archetype/s. Tané embodies the **huntress archetype** through her rigorous training and warrior spirit. Initially constrained by societal norms and guilt, Tané eventually pursues independence and bravery. Her character description is similar to that in Pagador and Moyano's (2023) study, which found that while women's conventional characteristics retained their relevance in the 21st century, their representation had evolved due to preceding modifications. As mentioned, this claim was related to Tané's characterization because she, in one instance, had let others forge her path. This was evidenced in the following lines found in the book: "*Tané stood and bowed, and the soldiers took her back to the palanquin. She had thought she would beg or weep or ask forgiveness, but in the end, she felt nothing.*" (Shannon, 2019, p. 335)

Meanwhile, her relationship with Nayimathun represents the **mother archetype**, as she cares deeply for her dragon and strives to protect it. Tané's nurturing instinct extends beyond her dragon to those she loves, aligning with the mother archetype's emphasis on caring and creating a safe environment.

Hero Archetype/s. Tané is characterized as a willing and active hero, accepting the dangers of being a dragon rider and fighting against the Nameless One. Tané shows boldness and dedication to adventure as she forges ahead and takes charge of her surroundings. In addition, Tané exhibits characteristics of the group-oriented hero archetype because, at first, she belongs to the dragon riders and follows their hierarchy. However, as the plot develops, Tané separates from the party of dragon

riders she had been with and embarks on a solo adventure with her dragon, Nayimathun. She eventually rejoins them after the Nameless One had been finally vanquished. Her excursion pushes her beyond her comfort zone and challenges her, thus emphasizing her adventure alone in the wilderness. Her confidence and competence in her abilities further underscore her as a modern representation of female heroism.

Analysis of Sabran IX in Samantha Shanno's The Priory of the Orange Tree (2019)

Women Archetype/s. Sabran IX embodies the **queen archetype**, symbolizing leadership, initiative, and management of her life and kingdom. Despite societal pressures to produce an heir, Sabran's true desires conflict with her role, highlighting her struggle with control. Her reluctance to embrace motherhood and desire for power reflect her character's complexity. A skilled negotiator and strategic thinker, Sabran exemplifies leadership and confidence, fitting the queen's archetype attributes.

Hero Archetype/s. Sabran IX, the reigning queen of Inys, is a quintessential representation of the unwilling hero. Her journey throughout the novel exemplifies her evolution from a figure burdened by duty and fear to a leader who embraces her role with newfound strength and purpose. Initially, Sabran's primary concern revolves around her obligation to produce an heir, which is essential for the survival of her lineage and the perceived protection of her realm. However, as the narrative progresses, Sabran's character highlights her transformation into a decisive and authoritative leader, capable of facing her fears and making strategic decisions for the greater good of her kingdom.

Therefore, Sabran's unwilling heroism is underscored by her heroism through governance, diplomacy, and a resolve to maintain peace and stability within her realm. This aligns with the archetypal "reluctant hero" described by Jung, where the hero is drawn into action due to circumstances beyond one's control, rather than by choice.

Analysis of Alina Starkov in Leigh Bardugo's Shadow and Bone (2012)

Women Archetype/s. Alina Starkov begins the story as a representative of the **maiden archetype**. This archetype, as noted by Faines (2021), typically represents a young, helpless woman who must be saved, often by a man. Alina fits this archetype initially due to her key characteristics.

Alina is described as a typical and unremarkable mapmaker in the First Army. She lacks self-assurance and feels inferior to her more accomplished and stronger peers, such as her friend Mal. In fact, in addition to this, Alina is captured early in the story by enemy forces (the Fjerdans) and is almost killed. Her survival depends entirely on the intervention of her knights and the Darkling, who, unbeknownst to her, is also her captor and manipulator. Her need for rescue reinforces the notion that she needs saving. As a result, Alina's reliance on the Darkling and her emotional struggles reflect the typical traits of the maiden archetype. She is made to wear a necklace that binds her to the Darkling's commands, symbolizing her physical and emotional captivity. This aligns with Nouri and Mohammadi's (2015) observations of female characters who are dehumanized and portrayed as damsels struggling with love and desire.

Hero Archetype/s. Despite beginning as a damsel in distress, Alina evolves into an unwilling hero, showcasing significant character growth and resilience. Alina's transformation begins when she recognizes the Darkling's deception and manipulative control over her abilities. She starts to fight against his influence and seeks to reclaim her autonomy. She refuses to let her need for rescue be the only thing that defines her, so she decides to fight.

As the story progresses, Alina gains courage and independence, particularly when she decides to act to save her friend Mal. Her willingness to confront danger and fight for those she loves marks her transition into the **hero archetype**. This transformation aligns with the description of the unwilling hero, who gains courage when the stakes are high (Vogler, 2007). Alina's eventual ability to free herself from the Darkling's control and assert her own power demonstrates her evolution from a helpless maiden to an empowered hero. This mirrors the journey of other female characters in literature who overcome societal constraints and personal fears, as highlighted by Mallick's (2019) study on women's

liberation and Jamalpour's (2017) findings on the defiance of societal norms by female characters in *Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*.

Analysis of Lore in Alexandra Bracken's Lore (2021)

Women Archetype/s. Lore Perseous, a descendant of Perseus, reflects the traits of the huntress archetype. Faines (2021) described the huntress as a fierce and independent woman who loves autonomy and independence. Lore exemplifies this archetype, as she is fiercely independent and has been training in combat and survival techniques from a young age to equip herself for a life of her own. This is evident when she abandons her family and embarks on a risky voyage, relying exclusively on her own resources. Her decision to move into the city by herself further shows her stubborn independence despite the potential perils. This aligns with the **huntress archetype's** ideal representation of independence and autonomy, as Carl Jung described.

Furthermore, Lore's physical strength and battle prowess are prominent throughout the novel. She demonstrates her combat skills by taking on both human and supernatural foes, which solidifies her reputation as a protector—a role that is taken on by many huntresses. Her willingness to fight to protect those she loves underscores her role as a confident, strong individual.

Lore attempts to flee the society to which she belongs, evading her true desires due to the outdated beliefs and practices within the culture of the Agon. Lore also values personal responsibility and freedom, which ties back to the huntress archetype. She believes in owning up to one's actions and accepting the consequences, even if it means making difficult choices.

Hero Archetype/s. Despite her natural propensity for hunting, Lore consistently seeks to leave the Agon world. Her reluctance and desire to avoid the quest align with the **unwilling hero archetype**, characterized by hesitation and the need for external motivation or prodding to embark on an adventure (Faines, 2021).

Lore's development is influenced by external forces, particularly Castor and Athena. Castor's reentry into her life and Athena's persistent prodding push Lore to confront her true nature and responsibilities. This external influence catalyzes her transition from a reluctant participant to an active agent in her destiny. As the novel progresses, Lore gradually accepts her role and responsibilities, ultimately participating in her own destiny. Her evolution from a reluctant to a determined hero is marked by her willingness to make risky choices and face the consequences for the sake of her autonomy and the protection of those she loves.

Analysis of Athena in Alexandra Bracken's Lore (2021)

Women Archetype/s. Athena, the second central heroine, aligns with the female **sage archetype**. Jung (1959) defined the sage as someone who represents knowledge and wisdom, and Faines (2021) described the sage as an entry point to accomplishment, wisdom, and the ability to separate thoughts and feelings. Athena embodies these traits throughout the novel because she showcases her wisdom and vast knowledge as an immortal entity. She serves as a mentor figure to Lore, offering guidance and knowledge to help her navigate these challenges. As an example of her old existence, Athena shares an ancient tale with Lore—drawing upon her vast knowledge to unravel mysteries and questions—when Lore accuses Athena of punishment that she inflicted on Arachne, particularly to Medusa.

Athena's strategic thinking and problem-solving abilities further reinforce her sage archetype. She meticulously plans her actions and manipulates situations to achieve her goals. Her ability to analyze situations and devise effective strategies is evident in her careful manipulation and guidance of Lore. Moreover, Athena values reason over emotion, consistent with the sage archetype's emphasis on objectivity and rationality. She demonstrates emotional control and advises others to do the same, stressing the importance of logical thinking in difficult situations.

Hero Archetype/s. Athena's actions and motivations align her with the **willing hero archetype**, as she is driven by her own goals and is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve them. Her proactive pursuit of her objectives and her willingness to manipulate circumstances to her advantage reflect the characteristics of a willing hero.

In addition, Athena's willingness to push circumstances and decisions in the novel for her own ends highlights her focus on the future she desires. Her actions demonstrate commitment to her plans, making her a willing hero who actively shapes her own destiny.

To visually depict and organize the researcher's observations regarding the similar characteristics exhibited by the heroines in the three selected epic fantasy novels, tables are provided. Table 2 serves as a comprehensive representation of the individual findings of the characters' archetypes of women, allowing for a clear and concise overview of the female archetypes among the central heroines.

Table 2 *Carl Jung's Archetypes of Women*

Characters	Archetypes of Women
Ead	Huntress and Sage
Tané	Huntress and Mother
Sabran IX	Queen
Alina	Maiden
Lore	Huntress
Athena	Sage

On the other hand, Table 3 provides a valuable visual aid that enhances the understanding of the similar characteristics that emerge from the research, fostering a deeper comprehension of the heroines' archetypal roles and the overarching narratives of the epic fantasy novels under scrutiny.

Table 3 *Similar Characteristics of the Heroines using Carl Jung's Archetypes of Women*

Huntress	Sage
Ead	Ead
Tané	Athena
Lore	

In the context of the three selected epic fantasy novels under study, half of the central characters, namely, Ead, Tané, and Lore, were classified as falling under the huntress archetype. The huntress archetype represents strong, independent female warriors who exude confidence and possess a sense of autonomy. In harmony with the characteristics commonly associated with the huntress archetype, these heroines represented remarkable combat skills, unwavering determination, and a fierce sense of personal agency.

After conducting this analysis, the researchers concluded that these heroines were indeed rising as they were able to transcend various societal limitations and discriminations presented in the study by embodying two different archetypes that describe and portray a woman as strong and powerful.

Meanwhile, Table 4 serves as a visual representation that delineates the individual hero archetypes of the female characters under study, providing a structured and accessible overview of the various heroine archetypes in the study.

Table 4 *Carl Jung's Archetypes of Heroines*

Characters	Archetypes of Women
Ead	Anti-hero, Catalyst, Loner, and Group-Oriented
Tané	Willing and Active and Group-Oriented
Sabran IX	Unwilling
Alina	Unwilling
Lore	Unwilling
Athena	Willing and Active

Whereas Table 5 functions as a comprehensive guide that offers a visual taxonomy of similar heroic personas portrayed by the female protagonists, contributing to an easier understanding of the representations of female heroism within the analyzed novels.

Table 5 *Similar Characteristics of the Heroines using Carl Jung’s Archetypes*

Willing and Active	Unwilling	Group-Oriented
Tané	Sabran	Ead
Athena	Alina	Tané
	Lore	

As seen in the tables provided above, by using Carl Jung’s archetypes of women and heroes, the researchers were able to deduce that these heroines already stood out as powerful heroes. The female characters all epitomized striking and compelling characteristics and archetypes by being able to transcend and overcome the expected and stereotyped roles of women in an epic narrative. Showalter’s search for female representation and/or experience was thus achieved in these contemporary epic fantasy novels because every central heroine was successful in challenging traditional portrayals imposed on them by society in classic epic stories. Most importantly, the female writers of these epic fantasy novels were also able to achieve the “female” phase of gynocriticism, as they successfully characterized a woman outside the patriarchal mentality. Moreover, the exploration and search for their representation were provided by the central heroines throughout the novels as they struggled to overcome social perceptions of femininity through encountering the many difficulties and challenges that they experienced. Nevertheless, this concept of female representation and/or experience was achieved because they were able to prove that women could be heroines as well.

In summary, these contemporary heroines were indeed proven to be powerful and rising, as none of them fell under Jung’s other archetypes that could have described them as damsels in distress. By featuring powerful woman archetypes like the sage and the huntress in epic fantasy narratives, women were empowered to become rising heroines by subverting traditional gender roles and embracing qualities typically associated with heroes. These archetypes empowered female characters and provided a platform for them to shatter stereotypes, asserting that women can be strong, independent, and capable of transcending societal limitations— characteristics which were previously only associated with male heroes.

Implications of the Heroine’s Similarities in 21st Century and Epic Fantasy

The analysis of the heroines' similar characteristics in contemporary epic fantasy novels indicates a significant shift towards more diverse and empowered female characters. This trend reflects broader societal transformations as women pursue representation and equality. These heroines defy traditional gender stereotypes and societal expectations, thereby highlighting a move towards portraying strong, independent, and multifaceted heroines in 21st-century epic fantasy.

These heroines' archetypal traits emphasize different aspects of femininity. For example, the huntress archetype symbolizes physical prowess and independence, while the unwilling hero archetype represents inner strength and perseverance. These varied archetypes showcase the complexity and diversity of women's experiences, which are often underrepresented in literature. However, as Brown (2015) noted, colloquial adjectives used to describe female desirability often portray sexually appealing women as dangerous, revealing how femininity is frequently framed as a threat. In contrast, contemporary epic fantasy reclaims these traits as sources of strength. This shift encourages readers to question gender stereotypes and advocate for equality and empowerment in real life.

Cooper and Short’s (2012) research showed that women, historically hidden, are now tangible, multidimensional, and unquestionably present. This visibility reflects a change in the representation of female characters from classical epics to contemporary epic fantasies. The central heroines’ similar

characteristics demonstrate that, although women have historically been underrepresented in epic fantasy, they now embody specific viewpoints, lived experiences, and narrative agency. As Măcineanu (2015) noted, while female characters are scarce in number, they possess a powerful presence and often shape the course of the story.

The heroines' manifestation of Socratic philosophical thoughts and teachings indicates intellectual and philosophical depth, challenging the assumption that female characters exist primarily for aesthetic purposes or as romantic interests. Gibson (2022) notes that women in the 18th and 19th centuries created heroines with conventions and stereotypes different from those in narratives about male heroes. This newer representation and empowerment reflected a shift towards diverse and inclusive narratives, featuring strong, intellectually deep, and capable women as central characters. These stories offer representation for historically marginalized or underrepresented readers.

Meanwhile, Ali (2014) showed how evolving storytelling and genre conventions facilitate debates and modifications surrounding gender issues. This evolution allows the embodiment of powerful heroines in the fantasy genre to be widely reflected. Traditional tropes and archetypes are being reimagined and expanded to create more complex and nuanced female characters, enriching the narrative landscape. This evolution reflects a larger cultural and societal shift, recognizing gender equality and the need for diverse narratives. These characters shape and reflect changing attitudes towards gender roles and expectations, challenging the notion that women are passive players in their own stories, and reinforcing that they can be active agents of change.

In conclusion, the similar characteristics of the heroines in 21st-century epic fantasy novels represent a transition towards more diverse and empowered heroines. These modern heroines contrast with traditional portrayals as damsels in distress and embody rising and powerful characters. Considering Carl Jung's archetypes, which were long associated with male heroes, their evolution in today's female heroines suggests a broader entrance to female experiences and gender equality. These heroines challenge gender roles and stereotypes, offering empowering role models and showcasing a better representation of women by exhibiting different archetypes and philosophies.

Conclusions

Based on the study's findings, the heroines in the selected contemporary epic fantasy novels demonstrate a decisive challenge to entrenched gender roles and stereotypes that have long constrained women in literature. These characters do not merely resist traditional archetypes; they embody new forms of agency by drawing on diverse archetypal roles and philosophical frameworks, thereby offering readers models of empowerment and intellectual depth.

The enduring appeal and popularity of contemporary epic fantasy may be traced to its capacity to construct immersive worlds, develop complex characters, and engage with universal themes. Within these imaginative spaces, inclusion of themes such as female experience, morality, and diversity fosters moments of reflection and personal connection, enabling readers to recognize themselves in the narratives and to reconsider dominant cultural assumptions.

By foregrounding empowered heroines, contemporary epic fantasy contributes to the broader cultural movement toward gender equality and inclusivity. These works expand the spectrum of literary representation, generating narratives that are more reflective of varied perspectives and lived realities. Ultimately, the application of gynocriticism and archetypal criticism underscores the significance of studying how female characters shape narrative trajectories, disrupt patriarchal conventions, and participate in the ongoing redefinition of women's roles in literature.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions derived from this study, several recommendations are advanced to strengthen the discourse on female representation in epic fantasy and to extend its cultural, pedagogical, and scholarly implications.

First, authors and publishers are encouraged to continue creating and promoting literature that foregrounds diverse, multidimensional, and empowered female characters. The positive representation of women in epic fantasy not only reconfigures long-standing literary traditions but also resonates with contemporary struggles for gender equity. By broadening the scope of female archetypes beyond the reductive “damsel in distress,” writers and publishers can actively contribute to reshaping the imaginative landscapes available to readers. This move ensures that women are portrayed as agents of knowledge, leadership, and transformation—qualities that challenge both literary and cultural conventions.

Second, scholars and researchers should sustain and expand critical engagement with contemporary epic fantasy. This study demonstrates that the application of Gynocriticism and Archetypal Criticism yields meaningful insights into female representation; however, further inquiry is needed to investigate a wider corpus of texts, across diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Comparative analyses could illuminate how representations of female heroines vary across different traditions and how these portrayals engage with broader philosophical, political, and social currents. Such studies would enrich the field of literary criticism and underscore the dynamic role of epic fantasy in negotiating questions of identity, gender, and power.

Third, educators and curriculum developers are strongly advised to integrate novels featuring strong and complex female protagonists into course syllabi, reading lists, and classroom discussions. Doing so not only provides students with empowering role models, but also diversifies the literary canon to include perspectives historically marginalized in both literature and education. These texts serve as effective platforms for teaching critical thinking, feminist perspectives, and the evolving functions of literature in reflecting and shaping society. Incorporating such works into secondary and tertiary curricula also equips students with the analytical tools to question stereotypes, recognize systems of oppression, and appreciate inclusivity in narrative form.

Fourth, further research and analysis is recommended to explore the broader implications of female characterization in epic fantasy, particularly regarding its influence on readers’ perceptions and societal attitudes. Studies that combine literary criticism with reader-response theory, psychology, or cultural studies could reveal how contemporary audiences internalize or resist the archetypal representations of heroines. Investigating this relationship between text and reader would shed light on the transformative potential of literature as both a mirror and a catalyst for social change.

Finally, critical inquiry into narrative representation and cultural impact should remain a priority within literary studies. The depiction of empowered heroines is not simply a matter of genre evolution; it is also a matter of cultural responsibility. By highlighting the importance of inclusivity and representation in literature, future research can reinforce the value of diverse narratives in shaping more equitable societies. In this regard, the study of epic fantasy heroines may serve as a microcosm for examining the intersections of gender, power, and imagination in the 21st century.

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Body Composition, Functionality, and Injuries in Football among Amateur Male University Players in Central Thailand

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study examined Body Composition, level of Functionality, and Injury at a university in Central Thailand. It aimed to investigate the relationships among these variables within the context of non-athletic amateur football players in the selected geographical area, taking into account their relevant demographic characteristics.

Introduction/Background: Football is one of the most popular team sports, and many students, faculty, and staff are actively involved in it at the selected university in Central Thailand. A lack of comprehensive data exists on Body Composition and Injury risk among Thai university football players, particularly in comparison to professional athletes. Evaluating Injury becomes relevant to a relatively large population in the specific sport. The relationship between body composition and injuries among football players has been a topic of considerable research interest, particularly given the sport's physical demands. It has been found that body composition is linked to the likelihood of injury, with athletes having higher body fat percentages being more prone to injuries. Another variable of interest in this study was the level of Functionality, which is closely linked to body composition.

Methodology: A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing stratified random sampling for sample selection. This study had 113 respondents who were amateur male football players from the selected university. The data collected included general characteristics of the players, such as body composition, injury rates, and the level of functionality. Key leaders, including team captains and research assistants, administered the questionnaire to the players. Body composition was measured using the KARADA Scan Omron HBF-375, while injury and functionality were assessed via standardized questionnaires. Data were collected between April and June 2025. The statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, the Mann-Whitney comparative analysis test, the Chi-Square test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test. Jamovi Statistical Software Version 2.3.28.0 was used.

Findings: Among participants, 51% reported at least one injury during the season, with 55% of injuries occurring below the knee, and most resulting from contact mechanisms. The average body composition metrics were a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 22.98, body fat of 16.59%, and a Body Age of 28.95 years. The data showed no statistical significance (p -value $> .05$) between Body Composition, level of Functionality, and Injury groups. Mann-Whitney tests revealed no significant differences in Level of Functionality, BMI, Body Fat, and Body Age between Injury Groups (p -value $> .05$). Chi-square tests showed no association between Injury Groups and BMI across four levels (p -value $> .05$). Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed that there was no significance between Body Composition and Injury Groups. Although most variables did not show significant relationships, body fat demonstrated a statistically significant association with playing position ($p = .003$), and BMI was significantly related to the level of functionality ($p = .037$). The substantial correlation observed between body fat percentage and playing position implies that different positions within the team may necessitate varying body fat levels for optimal performance. The significance of this correlation between Body Mass Index and functionality suggests that as an individual's functional capacity changes, so does their BMI.

Contributions/Impact on Society: This study contributes to understanding injuries among amateur football players in non-athletic settings. The findings provided evidence that contrasted with studies linking body composition to injuries, indicating that other factors may also influence outcomes among the selected player profiles. This presented a need to investigate amateur football as a unique context with various factors that could impact injury. It also highlights the need to enhance player awareness of training, screening, and holistic health education for student athletes in university settings. The findings of the study can be used as informative material to strengthen proposed awareness. In particular, these insights may guide coaches, health educators, and university sports administrators in developing evidence-based programs that promote injury prevention and overall athlete well-being.

Recommendations: Key recommendations can be drawn from the results of this study. First, amateur football is a unique context, and results may vary depending on the context. The ideal way to investigate them in any context would require pilot testing. Second, football organizers can establish a medical record system to document injuries (e.g., type of injury, mechanism of injury, loss of playing days). Finally, players can reduce their risk of injury through proper pre-season training, screening, and holistic health education.

Research Limitations: Several limitations in this study are acknowledged. First, the study relied on self-reported injury data, which may be subject to recall bias. Recall bias can threaten a study's internal validity, potentially leading to erroneous conclusions about associations between variables. Second, the sample size may have been insufficient to detect meaningful effects.

Future Research: Future research could employ larger, more diverse samples (e.g., female, older populations) and objective measures of injury (e.g., medical records) to enhance validity. Additionally, exploring interactions between body composition and other variables (e.g., fitness level, previous injury history, individual player characteristics, and environmental conditions) may provide deeper insights into injury risk factors in amateur football.

Keywords: *Body composition, injury, functionality, amateur male football players*

Introduction

Studies have shown that body composition significantly affects football players' physical performance. For example, higher body fat percentages have been linked to lower levels of physical fitness, especially in younger players 12–14 years old (Nikolaïdis, 2012). These studies demonstrate that body composition has a significant impact on the athletic performance of football (soccer) players. For example, thinner players typically show superior performance indicators, which are essential in football and include sprinting speed and agility (Romann & Fuchslocher, 2011). Body composition, encompassing the proportions of fat mass, muscle mass, bone mass, and water in the body, is a critical determinant of athletic performance and injury risk, particularly in physically demanding sports like amateur football. Football's intense physical requirements, characterized by high-impact collisions, rapid acceleration and deceleration, and sustained exertion, place immense stress on the musculoskeletal system, making players vulnerable to various injuries (Vasileiadis, 2020). The interplay between body composition and injury risk involves biomechanical, physiological, and metabolic mechanisms. A well-optimized body composition can enhance power output, agility, and endurance, while conversely, imbalances in body composition can compromise these attributes and increase the likelihood of injury (Collins et al., 2020). Anthropometric and physical performance measures are crucial in understanding injury risk among young football players (Caswell et al., 2016).

It is frequently observed that forwards are slimmer than goalkeepers, defenders, and midfielders, indicating that ideal body composition profiles may be determined by positional demands (Romann & Fuchslocher, 2011). Moreover, the position of players on the field can also influence the relationship between Body Mass Index (BMI) and injury incidence. Research has shown that players in positions requiring more physical contact are more susceptible to injuries when they have elevated BMIs. For example, Finstein et al. (2015) noted that tricep tendon ruptures, which are more prevalent among

players with higher BMIs, often occur during defending, highlighting the role of body mass in injury mechanisms (Finstein et al., 2015). Similarly, Brophy et al. (2021) found that players with elevated BMIs were more likely to sustain Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) injuries through direct contact, further emphasizing the interaction between body mass and injury mechanisms in football (Brophy et al., 2021).

Functionality in the context of amateur football refers to the ability of players to perform the specific movements and tasks required by the sport efficiently and effectively without undue risk of injury. It involves everyday tasks and activities, considering physiological, psychological, and mechanical adaptation (Pérez-Gómez et al., 2022). Functionality is closely linked to body composition, as the distribution and amount of muscle mass, fat mass, and other tissue types can significantly impact movement mechanics, joint stability, and overall physical capacity.

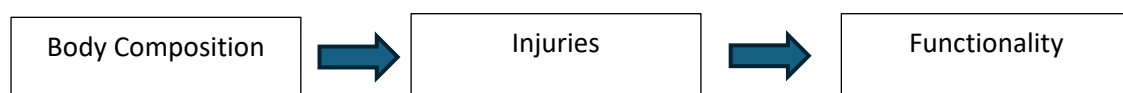
Ample evidence links body composition to the likelihood of injuries. According to studies, athletes with higher body fat percentages may be more prone to injuries, especially those involving the lower extremities, such as ACL tears (Brophy et al., 2010). Injury frequency has also been connected to asymmetry in body composition, namely, in muscular strength between limbs. Gribble et al. (2015) reported that BMI significantly influenced ankle function, suggesting that higher body mass could impair proprioceptive capabilities and balance, thereby increasing the likelihood of injuries such as lateral ankle sprains, particularly in football, where rapid directional changes and high-impact collisions are commonplace. Additionally, Jespersen et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study that demonstrated a relationship between total body fat percentage and lower extremity injuries, indicating that adiposity, as measured by BMI, is a predictive factor for injury risk in young athletes. This finding is crucial as it suggests that interventions to manage body composition could mitigate injury risks.

The prevalence of specific injuries also varies with BMI. A study by Yard and Comstock (2011) revealed that among high school athletes, obese football players had a higher incidence of knee injuries, with injuries more likely to result from contact. This finding aligns with the broader understanding that increased body mass can lead to greater mechanical stress on joints, particularly during high-impact activities like football. Furthermore, the relationship between BMI and injury risk extends beyond acute injuries to encompass chronic conditions, such as osteoarthritis, which can develop due to repeated stress on joints over time (Smith et al., 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The variables in this study were Body Composition, Functionality, and Injuries. The independent variable was Body Composition, the mediating variable was Injuries, and the dependent variable was Functionality. The diagram in Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship. It was proposed that there is a direct relationship between Body Composition and Injury, which creates an indirect relationship between Body Composition and Functionality.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*



To support the proposed conceptual framework, the biomechanical perspective and intrinsic risk factor model are stated as follows. From a biomechanical perspective, the distribution of mechanical stresses and forces on the musculoskeletal system is influenced by body composition. Higher fat mass, for instance, raises mechanical stress, which may result in increased fatigue, decreased stability, and more pressure on muscles and joints, all of which increase the risk of injury (Domaradzki, 2024). According to the intrinsic risk factor model, a person's body size, muscle mass, and fat distribution are important biological traits that influence their risk of injury (Domaradzki & Koźlenia, 2022).

Research Problem

Football, being the most widely played sport globally, inherently carries a significant risk of injuries among its participants (Pérez-Gómez et al., 2022). This applies to both professional and amateur players, with injuries leading to substantial time loss from play and considerable socioeconomic burdens (Pérez-Gómez et al., 2022; Asgari et al., 2022). Various factors contribute to injury. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between body composition, injury, and functionality. There is a limited understanding of how body composition directly affects the occurrence of injuries and how such injuries subsequently influence functionality among amateur male university football players, particularly regarding the location and mechanism of lower extremity injuries.

Research Objectives

1. To study the rate of Injuries (location and mechanism) among amateur university football players.
2. To study the levels of Body Composition (BMI, body age, and body fat) among amateur football players.
3. To study the association and variance between Body Composition, Functionality, and the incidence of football Injuries.

Hypothesis

There were two sets of hypotheses in this study; the null (H_0) and alternative (H_1) hypotheses for each set are presented below.

Injury Proneness and Body Composition

H_0 : There is no significant difference in injury proneness between amateur football players with higher body composition and those with lower body composition.

H_1 : Amateur football players with higher body composition are more prone to injuries than players with lower body composition.

Functionality Limitations and Body Composition

H_0 : There is no significant association between body composition and the severity of functionality limitations in amateur football players.

H_1 : Amateur football players with higher body composition have more severe functionality limitations than those with lower body composition.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The population consisted of students, faculty, and staff who play amateur football at a selected university in central Thailand. The league had eight teams participating; however, one team was excluded because they were a high school team. There were approximately 18 to 26 players registered for each team. The total population for the study consisted of 159 individuals; stratified random sampling was employed. A sample size of 113 was calculated from the population of 159 using the SurveyMonkey sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A cross-sectional study design was used, considering the feasibility and practicality of the population being studied. Amateur male university football players have limited and irregular participation (one amateur football league for the academic year 2024-25), often tied to academic schedules and other extracurricular activities.

Research Instruments

A digital body composition monitor, the KARADA Scan Omron Model HBF 375 machine, was used to measure participants' BMI, body fat, and body age. Items from the Questionnaire of Recording Injuries in Soccer for a Season (European Union, n.d.), and the Lower Extremity Functional Scale

(Binkley et al., 1999) were used for collecting injury and functionality data. Demographic profile questions were added to the questionnaire to facilitate various descriptive analyses.

Data Collection

The KARADA Scan was administered by skilled personnel to each player participant. Data collected using the KARADA Scan and the survey questionnaire were recorded in an Excel worksheet and a Word file. Key leaders, such as team captains and research assistants, helped distribute and collect questionnaires from the players. The Injury and Functionality data were described retrospectively in the questionnaire mentioned above, and the body composition was collected prospectively. Data collection was completed between April and June 2025.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Jamovi Statistical Software Version 2.3.28.0. Descriptive statistics and comparative analysis using the Mann-Whitney test were employed to compare the means of body composition metrics between the injured and non-injured groups. A Chi-Square test for associations and a Kruskal-Wallis test (Analysis of Variance) were used to compare body composition metrics across multiple groups.

Results and Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows that most players (65%) were aged 20–24, indicating a relatively young participant group.

Table 1 *General Characteristics of the Players*

Variables	Number	Percentage
Age		
15-19	10	9%
20-24	73	65%
25-29	28	25%
30 & above	2	1%
Faculty		
English as a Second Language	6	5%
Faculty of Arts and Humanities	18	16%
Faculty of Business Administration	13	12%
Faculty of Education	19	17%
Faculty of Information Technology	24	21%
Faculty of Nursing	6	5%
Faculty of Religious Studies	15	5%
Faculty of Science	10	9%
Not Available	2	2%
Players Position		
Goalkeeper	11	10%
Defender	43	39%
Midfielder	31	28%
Forward	24	23%
Years of Playing		
1-5	39	36%
6-10	45	42%
11-15	14	13%
16-20	9	8%
21-25	1	1%

The Faculty of Information Technology (FIT) had the highest representation (21%), followed by the Faculty of Education (FOE) (17%), and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (FAH) (16%). Defenders made up the largest group (39%), followed by Midfielders (28%) and Forwards (23%). Goalkeepers were the least common (10%), which is typical given team composition in football. Most players had 6–10 years (42%) or 1–5 years (36%) of playing experience, indicating a generally experienced group.

Injury Status

Table 2 shows that nearly half of the players (51%) reported being injured, indicating a relatively high injury rate.

Table 2 *Injury Status*

Injury Groups	Number	Percentage
Injured	58	51%
Uninjured	55	49%

Figure 2 shows that most injuries occurred below the knee (55%), common in sports involving running and sudden movements. Figure 3 shows that the most frequent causes were contact $n = (30\%)$ and sprinting (23%), while non-contact injuries were rare (3%). A significant portion (30%) was marked as "Not Applicable," likely referring to uninjured players.

Figure 2 *Location of Injury*

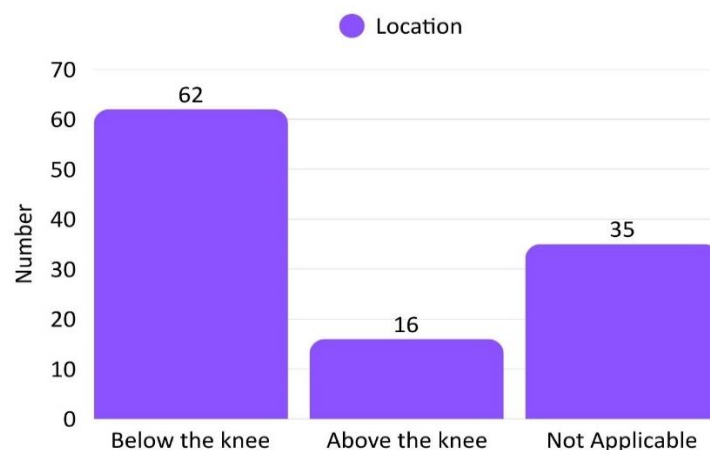
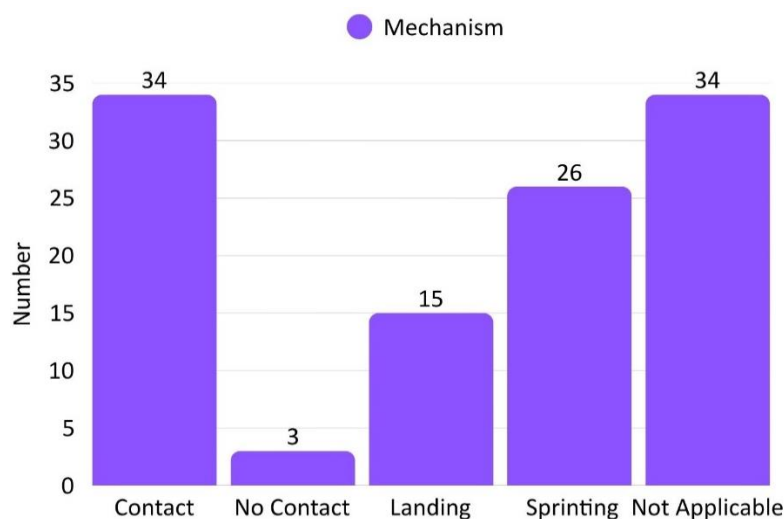


Figure 3 *Mechanism of Injury*



Levels of Body Composition and Functionality

Table 3 shows the description of body composition and functionality among the players. The average BMI was 22.98, which falls within the normal weight range of 18.5–24.9 (World Health Organization, 2010). The mean body fat percentage was 16.59%, which falls in the fair category of 14.9-18.6 (Villines, 2025), which may indicate a need for health awareness or lifestyle changes. The average body age was 28.95, close to the median of 28, suggesting a relatively symmetric distribution. The Standard Deviation (SD) of 9.59 showed considerable variation, with some individuals having body ages much younger or older than their actual ages. The **mean (64.64)** and **median (67)** of functionality both fell within the minimal to no limitation range, suggesting that most individuals in the sample were functioning well.

Table 3 *Body Composition and Functionality*

	N	Missing	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
BMI	113	0	22.98	22.70	3.43	15.90	37.20
Body Fat	109	4	16.59	16.50	5.65	5.00	33.20
Body Age	109	4	28.95	28.00	9.59	12.00	57.00
Functionality	113	0	64.64	67.00	14.56	9.00	80.00

Normality Shapiro-Wilk Test

The results showed that normality of data could not be assumed, as $p < .05$ on the Shapiro-Wilk test. Therefore, the following non-parametric tests were conducted.

Mann-Whitney Comparative Analysis

A Mann-Whitney t -test revealed no significant differences in the Level of Functionality, BMI, Body Fat, and Body Age between Injury Groups, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4 *Comparative Analysis Between Body Composition, Functionality, and Injury Group*

		Statistic	p
BMI	Student's t	-.72	.471
	Mann-Whitney U	1469.00	.361
Body Fat	Student's t	-.21	.831
	Mann-Whitney U	1455.00	.854
Body Age	Student's t	-1.61	.111
	Mann-Whitney U	1218.50	.093
Functionality	Student's t	.73	.468
	Mann-Whitney U	1504.50	.520

The Rank-Biserial Correlation (r_{rb}) values (shown in Table 5) close to 0 suggested very small or negligible effects. The wide confidence intervals (spanning nearly -1 to $+1$) indicated low statistical precision, likely due to small sample sizes or minimal group differences. Body Age shows the largest effect size ($r_{rb} = .237$) but still with a wide confidence interval, so caution in interpretation was applied.

Table 5 *Effect Size Summary*

Variable	Rank-Biserial Correlation	95% Confidence Interval
BMI	.080	(-.947, .948)
Body Fat	.088	(-.954, .948)
Body Age	.237	(-.940, .951)
Functionality	.057	(-.952, .945)

Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the association between Injury Groups and BMI across four weight levels (Obese, Overweight, Underweight, and Normal Weight). There was no statistically significant association between BMI and Injury Groups, $\chi^2 = 2.02$, $df = 3$, $p = .56$, as shown in Table 6. This suggested that BMI distribution did not differ meaningfully across Injury Groups in the sample analyzed.

Table 6 *Association Between Body Mass Index and Injury Groups*

		BMI				
Injury Groups		Obese	Overweight	Underweight	Normal Weight	Total
Uninjured	Observed	2	9	4	40	55
	% within row	4%	16%	7%	73%	100%
Injured	Observed	1	14	2	41	58
	% within row	2%	24%	3%	71%	100%
Total	Observed	3	23	6	81	113
	% within row	3%	20%	5%	72%	100%

Note. $\chi^2 = 2.02$, $df = 3$, $p = .56$

Analysis of Variance (Kruskal-Wallis)

Table 7 shows the variance between BMI, body fat, body Age, and playing position. BMI ($\chi^2 = 7.37$, $p = .061$) suggested that, although not significant, BMI may vary slightly across playing positions. Body Fat ($\chi^2 = 13.89$, $p = .003$) levels clearly differ across positions. Midfielders often have the lowest body fat, possibly due to the high aerobic demands of their position. Goalkeepers may have higher body fat as their role is less endurance-based. Forwards and defenders may fall in between, depending on tactical roles. Body Age ($\chi^2 = 5.60$, $p = .133$) revealed no substantial evidence that body age differed by position.

Table 7 *Kruskal-Wallis Variance between Body Composition and Playing Position*

	χ^2	df	p
BMI	7.37	3	.061
Body Fat	13.89	3	.003*
Body Age	5.60	3	.133

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the mean scores of body fat percentage by playing positions. Goalkeepers have the highest mean body fat (21%), likely due to less continuous running and more explosive movements. Defenders follow with 18%, balancing physicality and mobility. Midfielders

(16%) and forwards (14%) had the lowest body fat, reflecting their high aerobic demands and the agility requirements of their positions.

Figure 4 *Body Fat by Playing Positions*



Table 8 shows the variance between BMI, body fat, body Age, and injury groups. Since all p -values were greater than .05, the null hypothesis was accepted for all three variables. The analysis revealed no significant differences in BMI, Body Fat, or Body Age between injured and uninjured players, suggesting that these body composition indicators were not strongly associated with injury status. However, Body Age might be a possible area for further exploration due to its borderline p -value of .093.

Table 8 *Kruskal-Wallis Variance between Body Composition and Injury Groups*

	χ^2	df	p
BMI	.84	1	.359
Body Fat	.03	1	.852
Body Age	2.83	1	.093

Table 9 shows the variance between BMI, body fat, body Age, and level of functionality. Since the p -values were greater than .05 for body fat ($p = .204$) and body age ($p = .207$), the null hypotheses were accepted. However, the null hypothesis was rejected for the variable BMI ($p = .037$). BMI appeared to influence the level of functionality among the participants.

Table 9 *Kruskal-Wallis Variance between Body Composition and Functionality*

	χ^2	df	p
BMI	8.51	3	.037*
Body Fat	4.60	3	.204
Body Age	4.56	3	.207

Discussion

A Mann-Whitney *t*-test revealed no significant differences in the Level of Functionality, BMI, Body Fat, and Body Age between Injury Groups. Similar studies have shown that motor function, including strength and stability, does not significantly differ between injured and non-injured players, suggesting that baseline motor function may not be a reliable predictor of injury risk (Sieland et al., 2020).

The Chi-Square test assessed whether there was an association between BMI categories (underweight, normal weight, overweight, and obese) and the injury groups. The non-significant result ($p > .05$) indicated that the BMI category did not significantly influence the likelihood of sustaining an injury among amateur football players. This finding contrasts with previous research suggesting that higher BMI may increase injury risk due to factors such as musculoskeletal conditions (Anandacoomarasamy et al., 2008). However, our results aligned with studies that found no clear link between BMI and injury rates in non-elite athletes (Richmond et al., 2013). Possible explanations for this discrepancy include differences in sample characteristics (e.g., playing intensity) or the fact that amateur players may not experience the same biomechanical demands as professional athletes.

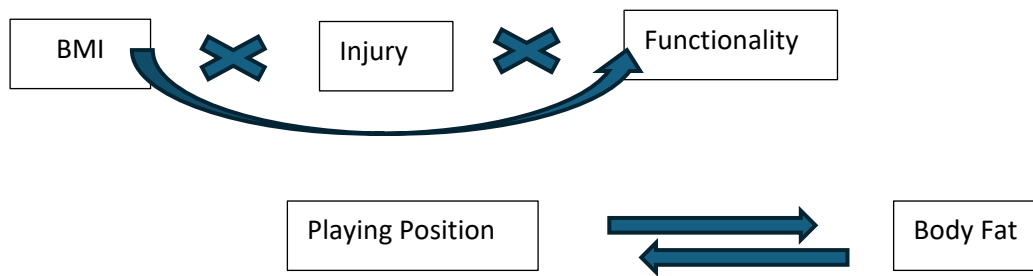
This study did not find a significant relationship between body composition and injury, which may suggest that unique injury factors exist within this amateur context. However, there was a significant difference between the level of functionality and BMI, as well as between body fat and playing position. Identifying a significant relationship between the level of functionality and Body Mass Index suggests that as an individual's functional capacity changes, their BMI also changes (Hammami et al., 2019). This could be indicative of several underlying physiological mechanisms, such as the influence of body weight on agility, speed, or overall physical performance in the sport (Caswell et al., 2016). An exploration into understanding whether the functional capability impacts BMI, or vice versa, could be further investigated. Furthermore, the significant result observed between body fat percentage and playing position implies that different positions within the team may necessitate varying body fat levels for optimal performance. This observation aligns with the understanding that certain positions may require greater bursts of power, while others require more endurance (Hermassi et al., 2020).

Amateur Football Players' Injury

Amateur football, characterized by its broad participation base and varying levels of competition, presents a unique context for examining the factors influencing player injuries and functional capabilities (Vasileiadis, 2020). Studies have shown that various factors can influence lower extremity injuries and functionality in amateur football. Key variables include player posture, training routines, and footwear. Static posture has also been linked to injury risk (Snodgrass et al., 2021). Injuries resulting from running and sprinting highlight the need for tailored training regimens (Vassis et al., 2024). Footwear design, particularly in terms of stud placement and rigid soles, can adversely affect foot function and impair the foot's ability to absorb impact, thereby increasing the risk of injury during dynamic activities (Bruntzel, 2000). Other factors like individual player characteristics and environmental conditions (e.g., Football Field) may also exist. These factors could be explored further in the context of amateur football injuries.

Studies have shown that a higher BMI is associated with an increased risk of lower extremity and ankle injuries, particularly when combined with poor off-season training habits (Brumitt et al., 2020; Manoel et al., 2020). Compared to previous studies, the findings from this study showed that amateur football is a unique context. To gain a clearer understanding, the findings are presented within the conceptual framework shown in Figure 5. This implies that body composition does not directly affect injury, and injury does not affect functionality. However, the variable body composition, as measured by body mass index (BMI), influences functionality. There is also a clear relationship between playing position and body fat. The positions that require less running and movement tend to have higher body fat, while positions with greater physical demands, mobility, and aerobic requirements have lower body fat percentages. This is also reflected in Figure 5.

Figure 5 *Revised Conceptual Framework*



This study highlights the need to enhance player awareness of training, screening, and holistic health education for student athletes. Weight et al. (2016) found in their study that athletes knew more about nutrition, health, injuries, and body awareness than non-athletes. However, both groups still had low overall knowledge. Although non-athletes or amateur players are not as regularly engaged in playing, they are still vulnerable to serious risks that could be prevented. A systematic plan incorporating the suggested variables could mitigate injury risk, improve functionality, and enhance body composition levels among non-athletic amateur male football players in the selected geographical location.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the association and variance between body composition, functionality, and Injury. The two proposed research hypotheses stated that amateur players with higher body composition are more prone to injuries than players with lower body composition and would have severe functionality limitations. Player Position was added to determine the impact on the variables. This study showed that there were no significant differences in injury proneness between amateur football players with higher body composition and those with lower body composition. However, it was observed that there was a statistically significant association between the level of functionality and BMI, as well as between body fat and playing position. This shows that although BMI did not directly impact injury groups, it did impact the level of functionality. It also revealed that body fat had an impact on playing position. This contrasted with the results of some previous studies, which supported the findings of a relationship between body composition and injury rates. This study shows that amateur football players may be in a unique context that needs further investigation. A key takeaway from the study is the recommendation to develop team training, screening protocols, and holistic health education programs for students who are amateur football athletes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting this study. First, the study relied on self-reported Injury and functionality data, which may be subject to recall bias. Recall bias can compromise the internal validity of studies, leading to incorrect conclusions about associations between variables (Hassan, 2005). Additionally, the sample size may have been insufficient to draw definitive conclusions. Future research could employ larger, more diverse samples (e.g., females, older populations) and objective measures of Injury (e.g., medical records) to enhance validity. Additionally, exploring interactions between Body Composition and other variables (e.g., fitness level, previous injury history, individual player characteristics, and environmental conditions) may provide deeper insights into injury risk factors in amateur football.

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- 1.4. Manuscripts should use Calibri font size 11.
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6. Recommended Verb Tenses for APA Style Articles (p. 118)

Paper Section	Recommended Tense	Example
Literature review (or whenever discussing other researchers' work)	Past Present perfect	Quinn (2020) presented Since then, many investigators have used
Method	Past	Participants completed a survey
Description of procedure	Present perfect	Others have used similar methods
Reporting results	Past	Results were nonsignificant Scores increased Hypotheses were supported
Discuss implications of results	Present	The results indicate
Presentation of conclusions, limitations, future directions, etc.	Present	We conclude Limitations of the study are

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