The National Arts Month of the Philippines, College Students of St. Paul University Manila, and Celebrating Art in Community

Brian Bantugan, Gertrude Montenegro, and Benedicto Modesto

St. Paul University Manila

ABSTRACT

Art festivals play a crucial role in youth education, offering a dynamic platform for creativity, cultural exposure, and critical thinking. This study examines how first-year college students at St. Paul University Manila engage with National Arts Month (NAM) and the extent to which it influences their appreciation of Filipino culture. A qualitative approach was employed, using a seven-item mixed open- and closed-ended survey distributed via Google Forms. With a 57% retrieval rate from 43 out of 75 students, findings indicate that 55% of respondents are unaware of NAM. Those informed primarily received information from the university's Facebook group chat (49%) and social media (44%), while only 22% learned from traditional media and personal interactions. Notably, no respondent gained awareness through government sources. The study underscores the need for broader promotional efforts to enhance youth engagement with NAM, fostering cultural literacy, self-expression, and lifelong appreciation for the arts.

Keywords: National Arts Month, art appreciation, Filipino culture, student awareness, media sources, cultural engagement

INTRODUCTION

Art festivals play a vital role in youth education by fostering creativity, self-expression, and cultural awareness. These events provide a platform for young individuals to explore various art forms, such as visual arts, music, dance, and theater, encouraging them to experiment and develop problem-solving skills (OWIS, n.d.). Additionally, exposure to diverse artistic expressions helps broaden perspectives and promotes empathy towards different cultures, challenging stereotypes and fostering inclusivity (EuroKids, n.d.). By engaging with artworks from various traditions, students develop cultural literacy, which enhances their understanding of global heritage.

Beyond creativity, participation in art festivals strengthens critical thinking, communication, and social skills. Youths learn to analyze and interpret artworks, forming their own opinions and engaging in discussions with artists, which sharpens their analytical abilities (Ramagya School, n.d.). Moreover, these festivals provide opportunities for collaboration through group projects and performances, promoting teamwork and a sense of belonging. Expressing themselves artistically can also help students process emotions and build confidence (OWIS, n.d.). Such experiences contribute to their overall emotional well-being, reinforcing essential interpersonal skills necessary for future personal and professional interactions.

Furthermore, art festivals instill a lifelong appreciation for the arts by creating enriching and memorable experiences. This engagement encourages continued involvement in artistic endeavors, whether as creators, audiences, or advocates for the arts. Studies have shown that arts participation fosters a passion for learning that extends beyond academic settings, influencing cognitive and social development (Ramagya School, n.d.). By integrating art into their lives, students gain a deeper appreciation for creativity, culture, and self-expression, reinforcing the role of arts education in shaping well-rounded individuals.

Art Appreciation as a course in the undergraduate program

Art appreciation plays a vital role in undergraduate education by fostering critical thinking, cultural literacy, and lifelong engagement with the arts. It encourages students to move beyond passive observation, helping them

understand the historical, social, and cultural contexts of artworks. As Efland (2002) argues, art education should be an integrated part of the curriculum rather than an isolated subject, contributing to a well-rounded education. Through critical analysis, students develop higher-order cognitive skills, such as evaluation and interpretation, which are transferable to other academic disciplines and real-world situations (Bloom, 1956). This intellectual engagement helps students form independent, evidence-based opinions about art.

Beyond critical thinking, art appreciation courses significantly enhance cultural literacy by exposing students to diverse artistic traditions and historical periods. This broadens their perspectives and fosters cultural sensitivity, an essential quality in an increasingly interconnected world. Banks (2004) emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive teaching, which includes studying various art forms to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. Additionally, students develop aesthetic awareness and communication skills by analyzing and discussing artworks. Dewey (1934) highlights that art is not just an object but an experience, and engaging with it meaningfully can lead to a lifelong appreciation of artistic expression.

Moreover, art appreciation cultivates emotional intelligence and empathy by allowing students to explore emotions and perspectives expressed in art. Art can serve as a bridge to understanding human experiences, fostering compassion and social awareness. Heath (1998) suggests that engagement with the arts helps students develop emotional intelligence, which is crucial for strong interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, art appreciation courses prepare students to be informed, culturally aware, and engaged individuals by equipping them with the analytical, communicative, and emotional skills necessary for both personal and professional growth.

Status of art education in developing countries

Art education in developing countries faces significant challenges, including limited funding, lack of recognition, and a shortage of qualified teachers. As Efland (2002) notes, a nation's commitment to art education reflects its broader cultural values and priorities, yet many developing countries struggle to allocate resources to the arts due to competing demands for basic literacy and numeracy programs. The lack of financial support results in inadequate art supplies, equipment, and teacher training, further marginalizing the subject. According to UNESCO (2006), insufficient resources remain a major obstacle to quality education, including the arts, in many developing nations.

Beyond financial constraints, social perceptions also hinder the integration of art education. Many parents and communities view art as a luxury rather than a necessity, prioritizing vocational subjects that are seen as more economically viable. This lack of demand further weakens the status of art education in schools. Bamford (2006) highlights that the perceived irrelevance of art to economic development often prevents its full integration into the curriculum. Additionally, a shortage of qualified art teachers exacerbates the issue, as many teachers lack the necessary training to provide quality instruction. Eisner (2002) emphasizes that effective art education requires knowledgeable educators who can foster artistic exploration and skill development.

Despite these obstacles, progress is being made through innovative approaches and community-driven initiatives. Non-governmental organizations, international collaborations, and grassroots programs are stepping in to provide access to art education in underserved areas. Heath (1998) underscores the role of community-based arts programs in expanding educational opportunities. Furthermore, art education is increasingly recognized for its contributions to creativity, problem-solving, cultural preservation, and social cohesion. Robinson (2001) argues that art education is not just an extracurricular luxury but an essential component of a well-rounded education that can drive both individual and societal progress. By investing in art education, developing countries can harness its transformative potential to support human development and cultural enrichment.

Dependence on government funds to create and sustain art festivals for education

Government funding plays a crucial role in launching and sustaining large-scale art festivals, particularly those with an educational focus. These events require substantial financial investment for venue rental, artist fees, marketing, and logistics, making private funding difficult to secure. Public grants and subsidies help bridge this

gap, ensuring that festivals can thrive and reach wider audiences. As McCarthy (2001) notes, public funding is essential in supporting arts organizations and cultural events that contribute to community development. However, while government funding provides necessary resources, reliance on it can create vulnerabilities, as shifts in political priorities, budget cuts, or policy changes may threaten the stability of these festivals. O'Brien (2010) highlights that this uncertainty can hinder long-term planning and limit opportunities for artistic experimentation.

Moreover, government funding can come with restrictions that affect artistic freedom and creative expression. While financial support is vital, it may also lead to concerns about censorship, political influence, and sustainability. Governments may impose conditions on content, limiting the autonomy of artists and festival organizers. As Belfiore and Evans (2007) argue, government arts funding is a "double-edged sword" that provides crucial support while raising questions about artistic independence (p. 89). Holden (2006) further emphasizes the potential for political interference, which can lead to self-censorship among artists seeking to align with government expectations (p. 76). Additionally, funding policies may create a system of patronage where certain artists or art forms are favored, reinforcing existing power structures and limiting diversity and innovation in the arts sector (Sandercock, 2003).

Despite these challenges, government funding remains a key support mechanism for educational art festivals, making it important to strike a balance between financial backing and artistic autonomy. One strategy is to diversify funding sources by incorporating private donations, corporate sponsorships, and earned income alongside government grants. This approach reduces dependence on a single source of funding, providing financial stability and creative freedom. As Schuster (2015) suggests, a diversified funding model strengthens the resilience of arts organizations and mitigates risks associated with fluctuating government support. Ultimately, ensuring transparency, fostering dialogue, and maintaining a balance between funding and artistic integrity can create a more sustainable and equitable system for supporting educational art festivals.

Studies on the National Arts Month in the Philippines

The National Arts Month (NAM) in the Philippines, celebrated every February, is a significant event that highlights the country's rich cultural heritage and artistic diversity. Established in 1991 through Presidential Proclamation No. 683, signed by President Corazon C. Aquino on January 28, 1991, NAM aims to promote and preserve Filipino arts and culture across various disciplines such as theater, dance, music, visual arts, architecture, literature, media arts, and film (The Lawphil Project, 1991), recognizing their vital role in nation-building and fostering a sense of national identity. As highlighted by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) (n.d.), NAM serves as a platform to showcase the diverse artistic expressions of Filipinos that highlight the significance of fostering creativity and artistic engagement among Filipinos.

The legal foundation of NAM aligns with the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which mandates that "Arts and letters shall enjoy the patronage of the State," and that the government must "conserve, promote, and popularize the nation's historical and cultural heritage and resources, as well as artistic creations" (The Lawphil Project, 1991). This constitutional provision underscores the role of the State in preserving and supporting cultural and artistic expressions, ensuring that the arts remain a core element of national identity. Further institutional support for the arts was established through Republic Act No. 7356 in 1992, which created the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). The NCCA is responsible for formulating policies for cultural development, coordinating national cultural programs, and administering the National Endowment Fund for Culture and Arts (NEFCA) (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, n.d.). This legislative framework strengthens the objectives of NAM by providing continuous funding and structured initiatives that support artists, institutions, and cultural organizations throughout the country.

Through these legislative measures, the Philippines demonstrates a long-term commitment to fostering a vibrant cultural landscape. The institutionalization of NAM ensures that artistic heritage is preserved, creative expression is encouraged, and the Filipino people remain deeply engaged with the arts as an essential part of their identity and national pride.

The month-long celebration usually features a wide array of activities and events held across the country,

including festivals, exhibitions, workshops, performances, and conferences. These events provide opportunities for artists to showcase their talents, for communities to engage with art and culture, and for the public to appreciate the richness and diversity of Filipino artistic traditions. One of the highlights of NAM is the "Pasinaya," a multi-arts festival organized by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). As described by Concepcion (2025), Pasinaya has evolved into the largest multi-arts event in the Philippines, featuring a diverse program of performances, workshops, and exhibitions that showcase the talents of Filipino artists.

Studies related to NAM and its impact on the Philippine arts and culture scene are still emerging. However, some research has explored the role of arts festivals in promoting cultural tourism and economic development. For instance, a study by Jao (2018) examined the impact of arts festivals on local economies in the Philippines, finding that these events can generate income and employment opportunities for local communities. While this study did not specifically focus on NAM, its findings suggest that arts festivals, including those held during NAM, can contribute to economic growth and development.

Furthermore, some studies have investigated the role of art in shaping national identity and promoting cultural heritage. A study by Rafael (2016) explored the relationship between art and nation-building in the Philippines, arguing that art can serve as a powerful tool for expressing national identity and promoting cultural pride. While this study did not specifically examine NAM, its findings highlight the importance of supporting and promoting Filipino arts and culture, which is one of the key objectives of NAM.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of arts and culture in the Philippines, there is still a need for more research on the impact of NAM and other arts festivals on the Philippine arts scene. Future studies could explore the following areas: (1) The impact of NAM on the development of Filipino artists; (2) The impact of NAM on audience engagement; (3) The role of NAM in promoting cultural tourism; and (4) The economic impact of NAM.

National Art Celebrations Abroad akin to the NAM

Several countries host annual events akin to the Philippines' National Arts Month, aiming to celebrate and promote the arts and humanities. In the United States, National Arts and Humanities Month (NAHM) is observed every October. Established in 1993, NAHM serves as the nation's largest collective annual celebration of the arts and humanities. Coordinated by Americans for the Arts, the initiative encourages individuals and organizations nationwide to recognize the profound impact of arts and culture on their communities and personal lives. The month-long celebration includes various events such as art exhibits, performances, and educational workshops, aiming to increase public awareness and participation in the arts (Americans for the Arts, n.d.).

Australia also emphasizes arts engagement through initiatives like the National Arts Participation Survey. Conducted by the Australia Council for the Arts, this survey measures Australians' involvement in various artistic activities, including attendance at arts events, exhibitions, and festivals. The survey's findings inform strategies to enhance public engagement and support for the arts across the nation (Australia Council for the Arts, 2017). Additionally, Australia's Festivals Australia program provides financial assistance to regional and community festivals, aiming to foster arts and cultural experiences across the country. This program supports a diverse range of activities, including workshops, performances, and exhibitions, thereby enriching the cultural fabric of Australian communities (Australian Government, Office for the Arts, n.d.).

Research Gap

A study focusing on the NAM and its impact on art appreciation students in a Catholic higher education institution can address the research gaps related to artist development, audience engagement, cultural tourism, and economic impact through a targeted approach. Because the study focused on students, it will primarily provide insights from the student perspective, offering valuable, though not comprehensive, data on the broader impacts. This paper did not intend to generalize its findings over the population of Art Appreciation students within a specific locale as it was intended to merely provide valid, albeit limited, data that could help the university use the NAM in the context of enhancing Paulinian education. Nevertheless, this could provide insights that could help better direct the NCCA's future programs.

Theoretical Framework

Given the study's context in a Catholic higher education institution, Catholic Social Teachings (CST) can provide a valuable ethical and social framework. CST principles, such as human dignity, the common good, and solidarity, can inform the study's exploration of how NAM contributes to students' personal development, their understanding of Filipino culture, and their sense of social responsibility. The framework can explore how NAM aligns with the institution's mission and values, and how it can contribute to the holistic development of students as informed and engaged citizens.

Statement of the Problem

The case study investigated how students of Art Appreciation in St. Paul University Manila, particularly first year college students taking mostly general education courses, are engaged in the NAM to understand how NAM is able to embed itself in the lives of young SPU Manila students who are considered the ones who can help sustain Filipino culture.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study made use of a seven-item mixed open- and closed-ended Google Form for its survey questionnaire. Only two of the seven items were closed-ended. The survey inquired about the students' awareness of the NAS and their sources of information about it. The survey was given to all first-year students (from all four colleges) of three Arts Appreciation classes in SPU Manila this ongoing academic year 2024-2025. The retrieval rate from a total of 43 volunteer student participants out of 75 was 57 percent. The quantitative information used descriptive statistical analysis while the qualitative information was processed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Awareness and Access of Information about NAM

The majority of the respondents or 55% are not aware about the NAM. Those who do learned about it from St. Paul University Manila's group chat in Facebook (49%), social media, in general (44%), and the rest from other sources (22% from traditional media, personal interactions, and the like). No one learned about it from any government unit. The distribution is presented in the graph below.
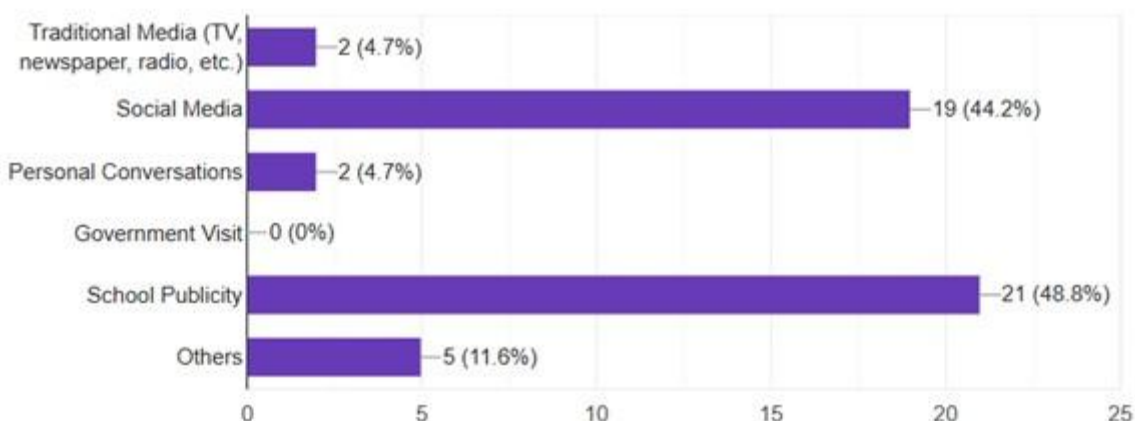

Figure 1. Awareness and Access of Information about NAM

Data suggest that, if not for the initiative of the university, through the personal interest of a faculty member that teaches courses related to the arts, social media access might facilitate their learning about it, instead. This said, the university plays a critical role when government units, which are hardly visited by college students (except, perhaps, state universities and colleges), are unable to reach out to the young adult generation using existing communication strategies.

How art is celebrated in the communities of college students

Art is primarily celebrated in communities through exhibitions, school events, and public showcases, aligning with existing literature that highlights the role of art in fostering cultural expression and community engagement (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). Many responses emphasize the importance of art displays and exhibitions as a means of recognition and appreciation. One respondent shared, "Each art of students in K to 12, many of their arts is display in a classroom showing the effort of their works," emphasizing how schools exhibit student artwork. Similarly, another mentioned, "Usually a[n] art display along the pool area," indicating that these exhibitions are held in various school spaces. This is consistent with research indicating that schools serve as crucial spaces for artistic development and public appreciation of student work (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Beyond school settings, art is also celebrated on a larger scale through events that "showcase [the] nation's rich artistic heritage." These findings support previous studies emphasizing that community-based art exhibitions contribute to cultural identity and social cohesion (Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2005).

Educational institutions play a key role in organizing art-related celebrations. One participant stated, "We do have an event that will showcase the art in St. Paul," highlighting how schools create platforms for artistic expression. Additionally, school publications contribute to art promotion through "art-related events, contests, and publication materials." Research suggests that integrating art into school curricula and extracurricular activities not only nurtures creativity but also enhances student engagement and well-being (Eisner, 2002). These initiatives demonstrate the role of schools in fostering artistic appreciation and providing students with avenues for artistic exploration.

Beyond educational institutions, art is also celebrated in public spaces and community-wide cultural events. One respondent observed that in their province, "the month of February is full of paintings, street arts, and even the opening of some new museums". This aligns with studies indicating that public art installations, festivals, and street performances create accessible artistic experiences that enrich community life (Landry, 2006). Public engagement with art has been found to enhance civic pride and contribute to urban regeneration (Miles, 2005). The presence of "paintings, street arts, and even the opening of some new museums" suggests that communities celebrate art not only as an aesthetic experience but also as a means of cultural storytelling and historical preservation (Zebracki, 2017, p. 214).

However, not everyone is fully aware of how art is celebrated in their community. One individual admitted, "I am not sure on how we celebrate this event," indicating a level of uncertainty. Despite this, they still recognized the presence of art in their surroundings, particularly through public murals and museum openings. Research suggests that while art celebrations are widespread, accessibility and awareness can be barriers to participation, particularly among marginalized or disengaged communities (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). This highlights the need for more inclusive and widely promoted art initiatives to ensure broader community involvement.

Overall, the responses indicate that art is celebrated through school-based initiatives, public exhibits, and cultural events, reinforcing the broader literature on the significance of art in education, community engagement, and cultural preservation. While awareness and participation levels may vary, existing research underscores the importance of making art accessible to all as a means of fostering creativity, social connection, and cultural identity.

How the students prefer to celebrate art

Art celebrations take various forms across different communities, with responses highlighting themes such as art exhibitions and showcases, accessibility and inclusivity, active participation, cultural appreciation, and social engagement. These preferences reflect both existing practices and evolving ways in which young people engage with art, aligning with recent research on participatory culture, arts-based youth development, and the broader social impact of artistic expression.

Art Exhibitions and Showcases. One of the most common ways art is celebrated is through exhibits, galleries, and public displays. Many respondents shared experiences of seeing student artworks exhibited in schools, as one noted, "Each art of students in K to 12 is displayed in a classroom, showing the effort of their works." Public

art spaces were also identified as key sites for appreciation, with another respondent mentioning, "Usually an art display along the pool area," while others emphasized national-level celebrations, "Through various art exhibits, events, and activities that showcase the nation's rich artistic heritage."

A similar sentiment was reflected in how individuals would like to celebrate art, with many preferring art showcases, museum visits, and exhibits. One participant shared, "Showcase of arts like exhibits as well as discounted or free entrance to museums," while another emphasized, "Visiting museums, art galleries, and enjoying various forms of art in my free time." Research suggests that young people increasingly engage with art through curated exhibitions, public installations, and pop-up galleries, which provide interactive and immersive experiences (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Accessibility and Inclusivity. Another strong theme in the responses is the need for greater accessibility to art experiences. Some respondents noted the importance of free or discounted access, stating, "Free entries to art galleries, exposure of local artists in PH," and "Fundraising art museums and galleries." Similarly, one respondent proposed, "It would be best to celebrate it by having an event dedicated to Filipino artists that can help the public be more appreciative of the arts."

This aligns with research on arts-based youth development, which emphasizes that removing financial barriers can help young people—especially those from marginalized communities—engage more deeply with art and culture (Catterall et al., 2012). The Wallace Foundation (n.d.) also highlights that youth value open and accessible art spaces where they can both observe and contribute creatively.

Active Participation in Art. Beyond passive observation, many respondents expressed a preference for hands-on engagement with art. Some wished to be participants rather than just spectators, as one noted, "By engaging and becoming a participant as an artist myself." Others suggested interactive activities such as "Making visual arts like slogan and poster making," and "Through an interactive activity."

School-based events were also seen as vital platforms for fostering artistic engagement, with respondents mentioning, "Creative activities in school that students can participate in," and "Activities in school like poster making and slogan making." Research suggests that young people today are drawn to interactive, technology-driven, and socially engaging art experiences, such as digital art collaborations, live mural painting, and participatory exhibits (Foundry10, 2021). These forms of engagement promote creative risk-taking and skill development, making art more meaningful and empowering.

Cultural Appreciation and Respect for Artists. Several respondents emphasized the role of art in honoring culture and recognizing artistic contributions. One stated, "By appreciating the arts of many with their creativity and skills, emphasizing paying tribute to our diverse culture and traditions." Others highlighted the importance of recognizing original artists, as one noted, "I would like to explore different exhibits to show respect to the original creators."

This theme aligns with broader trends in cultural heritage preservation and artistic recognition. According to Jenkins et al. (2009), young people increasingly seek ways to engage with artistic storytelling, indigenous art forms, and community-centered creative expressions, fostering a sense of cultural identity and appreciation.

Social Engagement and Personal Enjoyment. For some, celebrating art is also about social experiences and personal connections. One respondent noted, "I'll celebrate it with my whole family in Canada," while another suggested, "Having a meal with my family or friends." These responses highlight that for many, art is best experienced in communal settings, reinforcing its role as a means of bringing people together.

Additionally, some respondents expressed openness to participating in broader community celebrations, stating, "I don't mind celebrating NAM every February," and "I'm very interested in celebrating it! I would like to go to different places that showcase the arts, such as museums, galleries, and cultural centers." This reflects an evolving trend where youth see art not just as an isolated experience but as a shared cultural event that strengthens community ties (Frontier Economics & WHO Collaborating Centre for Arts and Health, 2024).

The responses illustrate diverse perspectives on celebrating art, from passive appreciation through exhibits and

galleries to active engagement in artistic creation and cultural events. Many emphasize the importance of accessibility and inclusivity, advocating for free or discounted entry to cultural institutions. Additionally, there is a strong recognition of art's role in cultural preservation, social engagement, and personal fulfillment. Research suggests that an ideal art celebration should integrate exhibitions, interactive activities, public access initiatives, and community-driven events, ensuring that art remains both a personal passion and a collective experience.

Comparing Traditional Community Art Celebrations and Youth Preferences

Art celebrations in communities have long been rooted in public exhibitions, cultural events, and institutional showcases. However, younger generations are reshaping how art is celebrated, favoring interactive participation, digital engagement, and greater inclusivity. A comparison of these approaches highlights key differences in accessibility, engagement, and artistic expression.

Accessibility and Inclusivity. Traditional community art celebrations often revolve around formal institutions such as museums, galleries, and cultural centers, which can sometimes be restrictive due to entrance fees, geographic limitations, or exclusive curation processes. Many community events also focus on showcasing established artists, leaving less room for emerging talents. In contrast, youth preferences emphasize accessibility and inclusivity, with many advocating for free or discounted entry to galleries ("Free entries to art galleries, exposure of local artists") and more opportunities for local artists to gain visibility ("Fundraising for art museums and galleries"). This shift reflects research findings that young people value democratized access to art, ensuring it is not confined to elite institutions but shared across diverse audiences (Catterall et al., 2012).

Passive Appreciation vs. Active Participation. Community-based art celebrations typically focus on passive appreciation, such as viewing exhibits and attending performances. Respondents from traditional celebrations describe setups where artworks are displayed but not interacted with, as one noted, "Display no touching, just seeing it with my own eyes on how amazing it is." Conversely, youth preferences lean towards active participation and creation, as seen in responses like "By engaging and becoming a participant as an artist myself" and "Through an interactive activity". This aligns with modern trends where young people favor experiential and hands-on learning, such as live mural painting, digital art collaborations, and interactive installations (Foundry10, 2021).

Event Structure and Social Engagement. Traditional celebrations often revolve around scheduled events such as national arts festivals, school exhibits, or local competitions, which are top-down in organization. Many respondents described art events as annual or institutionalized, such as "Celebrating NAM every February" or "Art exhibits and contests in schools". In contrast, youth prefer more spontaneous, socially driven, and everyday forms of engagement, often blending art with their personal and social lives. Some responses emphasized the role of family and peer involvement, such as "I'll celebrate it with my whole family" or "Having a meal with my family or friends." Additionally, young people increasingly engage with art through social media and online platforms, sharing and creating content to make art more accessible and engaging (Wallace Foundation, n.d.).

Cultural Appreciation vs. Contemporary Expression. Traditional community art events frequently center around preserving and showcasing heritage and national identity. Respondents from community events highlighted themes of Filipino artistic heritage and cultural preservation, such as "Celebrating by emphasizing tribute to our diverse culture and traditions". While youth also value cultural appreciation, they tend to embrace a broader and more contemporary view of artistic expression, incorporating modern art, digital media, and cross-disciplinary collaborations. One response reflects this shift: "I am not that knowledgeable in art, but I want to celebrate it by spreading it to media in order for us to give notice and support to the artists." This aligns with research showing that today's youth are more likely to celebrate art through digital storytelling, pop-up galleries, and multimedia creations (Jenkins et al., 2009).

While traditional community art celebrations emphasize structured exhibits, passive appreciation, and cultural heritage, youth-driven celebrations are more interactive, inclusive, and socially integrated. Younger generations are shifting towards participatory, digital, and everyday art experiences, making artistic engagement more personal, dynamic, and accessible. To bridge these differences, future art celebrations should blend structured

cultural events with participatory, technology-driven, and socially engaging activities, ensuring that art remains both a celebration of tradition and a reflection of evolving creative expression.

How SPU Manila celebrates art as experienced by students

An analysis of the responses regarding how schools celebrate art reveals three main themes: (1) Structured Events and Exhibits, (2) Limited Awareness and Engagement, and (3) Institutional and Digital Recognition of Art.

Structured Events and Exhibits. Many schools and universities celebrate art through organized events, exhibitions, and student showcases. Respondents noted that their school provides platforms for artistic expression, such as "collecting the artworks of the students to not waste their talent in creativity and effort" and "holding an exhibit showcasing the different artworks of students." SPU Manila have formalized art-centered programs, such as "MALIK-LAYA (senior high school capstone event on students' creative work)."

This aligns with research indicating that universities often celebrate art through annual festivals, dedicated art spaces, and collaborative projects that promote cultural and artistic appreciation (Budge, 2012). University-sponsored art weeks and student art fairs serve as platforms to showcase diverse creative talents, allowing students to gain public recognition and develop their artistic identities (Taylor & Littleton, 2012). Furthermore, having on-campus museums or galleries, as mentioned by one respondent ("SPUM has their own museum, opening it for the students and letting the arts be seen by the students and also explaining the meaning"), reflects a broader trend among universities to integrate art spaces into academic life (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007).

Limited Awareness and Engagement. Despite the presence of artistic initiatives, some students are unaware of the school's involvement in art celebrations. Several respondents stated that they had "not noticed yet" or were "not aware of any school engagement" in art-related activities. This suggests a gap in communication and student engagement, which is supported by research showing that while many universities invest in art programs, a lack of visibility and student participation remains a challenge (Bresler, 2007). Studies suggest that universities with well-promoted interdisciplinary art programs and interactive initiatives experience higher student engagement (Keane & Bunting, 2019). When schools actively involve students in the planning and execution of art events, participation rates increase, and art becomes more integrated into campus culture (Graham & Sims, 2020).

Institutional and Digital Recognition of Art. Beyond physical events, some schools recognize the arts through digital platforms, school publications, and symbolic gestures. Several responses highlighted the role of social media and school publications in promoting artistic expression, such as "Posting on the school's official page" and "School publication The Paulinian change display picture." This is consistent with the findings of Amsler (2015), who noted that digital engagement, online exhibitions, and virtual art competitions have become essential in modern university art celebrations. Universities that leverage social media and online platforms to promote student artwork provide more accessible avenues for artistic recognition and participation (Gielen, 2013).

School celebrations of art vary significantly, with some institutions implementing structured exhibits and events, while others rely on digital engagement or symbolic recognition. However, limited awareness among students suggests a gap between artistic initiatives and student participation. Research highlights that successful university art celebrations depend on visibility, interactive engagement, and digital expansion (Keane & Bunting, 2019). Moving forward, schools can enhance engagement by better communicating their art programs, expanding participatory opportunities, and integrating digital platforms to ensure all students feel included in the celebration of art.

Comparison of Art Celebrations: Communities, Student Preferences, and St. Paul University Manila

The celebration of art varies across different contexts, with distinct differences between how communities celebrate art, how students prefer to celebrate it, and how SPU Manila currently engages in art celebrations. These differences primarily manifest in (1) the level of accessibility and inclusivity, (2) the nature of engagement, and (3) the role of institutional support and visibility.

Accessibility and Inclusivity. Art celebrations in communities tend to be more public and inclusive, emphasizing free or discounted access to museums, exhibits, and galleries. Many community celebrations include festivals, competitions, and interactive events that invite people from all backgrounds to participate. Respondents suggested that "showcases of art like exhibits as well as discounted or free entrance to museums" and "fundraising art museums and galleries" would enhance accessibility. This aligns with research showing that community art events aim to democratize access to cultural experiences and encourage public engagement (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007).

In contrast, students prefer a more participatory and interactive experience, as indicated by their interest in art contests, hands-on creative activities, and digital engagement. Responses such as "through an interactive activity" and "by engaging and becoming a participant as an artist myself" highlight a desire for more personal involvement rather than passive appreciation. Modern youth-driven initiatives, such as pop-up galleries and social media-based art movements, reflect this shift toward more experiential and digital forms of engagement (Gielen, 2013).

At SPU Manila, accessibility appears to be more institutionally driven, with art celebrations taking place within the confines of the school. The university provides structured initiatives such as "school exhibits showcasing student artworks" and "the SPUM museum opening its doors for students." While these efforts foster artistic appreciation, some students remain unaware of these initiatives, as indicated by responses such as "I haven't noticed yet" and "I am not aware of any school engagement (yet) on the NAM." This suggests that while SPU Manila does have art celebrations, there may be a gap in visibility or student participation compared to community celebrations.

Nature of Engagement. In community settings, art celebrations are often social and collaborative, involving cultural performances, public murals, and interactive workshops. Respondents emphasized the importance of "exposing local artists" and creating "events dedicated to Filipino artists that help the public be more appreciative of the arts." This indicates that community celebrations focus not just on artistic expression but also on cultural heritage and collective participation.

Students, however, show a preference for individualized engagement, expressing interest in creating their own art through poster-making, slogan-making, and digital platforms. Statements like "by creating our own art" and "spreading it to media to give notice and support to artists" highlight a trend toward self-expression and advocacy through digital means. This aligns with contemporary research showing that youth tend to celebrate art in ways that reflect their personal identity and digital fluency (Keane & Bunting, 2019).

At SPU Manila, art celebrations are more structured and traditional, with an emphasis on exhibitions, publications, and formal events. Responses such as "our school publication changes its display picture" and "posting on the school's official page" suggest that while digital platforms are utilized, engagement is more institutionally controlled rather than student-driven. Compared to the interactive nature of community celebrations and the highly participatory preferences of students, SPU Manila's approach remains formalized and passive, with fewer opportunities for direct student involvement beyond viewing exhibitions.

Institutional Support and Visibility. Communities generally prioritize public funding and partnerships to sustain art celebrations. Respondents highlighted the need for "fundraising for art museums" and "school-community collaborations" to support artistic initiatives. Research confirms that local governments and cultural organizations play a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of community-based art projects (Amsler, 2015).

Students, on the other hand, seek more digital and grassroots movements that allow them to celebrate art in a way that is accessible, creative, and personally meaningful. This is evident in responses advocating for social media exposure for artists and interactive school-based activities. Youth engagement with art is increasingly shaped by online communities, virtual galleries, and digital storytelling (Graham & Sims, 2020).

SPU Manila's institutional role in celebrating art is rooted in structured academic traditions, such as museum visits, school-organized exhibits, and faculty-led events. However, the responses indicate limited student

awareness or active participation, suggesting a need for greater visibility and student involvement in decision-making regarding art celebrations. Compared to the community's broad accessibility and students' preference for participatory engagement, SPU Manila's current art celebrations may benefit from more interactive, student-led, and digital components.

While communities celebrate art through public accessibility and cultural participation, and students prefer digital and interactive experiences, SPU Manila primarily engages in formal and structured initiatives that are not always widely recognized by students. To bridge these differences, SPU Manila can enhance its art celebrations by incorporating student-led projects, social media-driven initiatives, and more interactive formats to align with modern student preferences and community best practices.

Importance of events such as NAM in the lives of college students

A Platform for Artistic Expression and Personal Growth. Many respondents see the NAM as an opportunity to refine their creative skills and develop their artistic identity. One participant shared, "As an artist, it empowers me to strengthen my practice and improve." Research supports this perspective, indicating that engaging in artistic activities fosters self-expression and allows individuals to explore their creativity, ultimately deepening their understanding of themselves (The Arts College West Sussex, 2024).

Art as a Medium for Emotional Well-Being. Several respondents emphasized how art provides an emotional outlet, helping them process their thoughts and feelings. One participant stated, "Art has contributed a lot of aspirations in my life. Without it, I cannot be able to express myself freely." This aligns with research showing that creative activities enhance emotional regulation and resilience, offering individuals a means of self-reflection and stress relief (Forward Pathway, n.d.).

Fostering a Greater Appreciation for Art. Beyond personal expression, many respondents highlighted the NAM as a means of developing a deeper appreciation for various artistic forms. One participant expressed enthusiasm for the event, saying, "I enjoy looking at art forms personally, so I would be happy if we are going to offer a month of appreciating arts!" Studies suggest that exposure to diverse artistic expressions during cultural festivals enriches individuals' understanding of different traditions and artistic styles, ultimately contributing to personal growth (Sprevatrop, 2025).

Recognizing and Supporting Artists. Another key theme is the importance of the NAM in providing visibility and recognition to artists. One respondent stated, "It is important since it exposes the artworks of artists." Research indicates that art festivals and cultural events play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion by uniting communities to appreciate and support local creatives (National Endowment for the Arts, 2021).

Limited Awareness and Engagement. Despite these positive sentiments, a portion of respondents expressed limited engagement with or indifference toward NAM. Some admitted to being unaware of its significance or activities, with one remarking, "I haven't seen much of the importance or made any realization of NAM in my personal life, but experiencing the event might change my perception about it." Studies suggest that limited participation in artistic events often stems from accessibility issues or a lack of exposure. Researchers emphasize the need for greater inclusivity and visibility in arts programming to encourage broader engagement (Nonsuch Foundation, n.d.).

Overall, the responses highlight a range of perspectives on the importance of NAM. While some individuals see it as an opportunity for creative growth, emotional expression, and cultural appreciation, others remain disengaged due to a lack of awareness or participation. These insights align with existing research on the value of arts engagement, reinforcing the need for inclusive initiatives that promote greater access and appreciation for the arts.

Student Recommendations in Improving Arts Celebrations and Festivals such as NAM

Enhancing Publicity and Awareness. A significant number of respondents emphasized the need to make the NAM more widely known. Suggestions included increasing publicity through various media platforms, both

online and offline, to reach a larger audience. One respondent stated, "Make it more known, *kumbaga paingayin ang pagdiriwang ng buwan ng sining*! (in short, make the NAM celebration noisier!)." Similarly, another respondent suggested, "More information/publicity about the NAM celebration." Research highlights the importance of visibility in cultural events, showing that increased promotion through multiple channels, including social media, school announcements, and community outreach, leads to higher participation rates (Jones, 2023).

Expanding Engagement and Participation. Many respondents suggested incorporating activities that encourage greater student involvement. Recommendations included organizing workshops, art exhibits, and interactive events that allow students to create and showcase their artwork. One participant proposed, "*Mag arts o pinta ang* students *at gagawa ng* exhibit *para makita ng iba pa ang mga gawa nila*" (The students should paint or create art exhibits so that others can see their work.). Another suggested, "More engagement in school events." Studies indicate that hands-on participation in artistic activities fosters a deeper appreciation for the arts and strengthens community involvement (Smith et al., 2022).

Diversifying Artistic Experiences. Several responses highlighted the need to explore various forms of art and provide students with broader artistic exposure. Suggestions included "To explore different kinds of exhibits" and "Art circles (where people share their interests and favorite pieces)." One respondent expressed interest in meeting a National Artist, stating, "I'm looking forward to meeting one of our National Artists in the Philippines and be one of their apprentices." Research shows that incorporating diverse artistic experiences, including professional mentorships, exhibitions, and collaborative projects, enhances students' artistic growth and appreciation (Gonzalez & Rivera, 2021).

Improving Access to Art Spaces and Events. Some respondents recommended establishing more spaces for artistic expression, such as galleries and exhibitions featuring student work. One participant suggested, "By putting up a small art exhibition made by students." Another emphasized the importance of "Letting the school have more events about the arts." Studies suggest that providing dedicated spaces for art appreciation fosters creativity and encourages active participation in cultural events (Turner, 2020).

Strengthening Community Involvement. A few responses emphasized the need to collaborate with local artists, organizations, and advocacy groups to create a more impactful celebration. One participant recommended, "To improve the NAM celebration, I recommend encouraging more student participation by organizing school-wide activities, art exhibits, and workshops that make art accessible to everyone. Schools could also collaborate with local artists or organizations to inspire students and broaden their artistic experiences." Research supports the idea that partnerships between schools and external cultural institutions enhance students' artistic exposure and learning experiences (Delgado, 2019).

The recommendations provided by respondents highlight the importance of increasing publicity, diversifying engagement strategies, expanding artistic opportunities, and fostering community involvement to enhance the NAM celebration. These insights align with research findings, emphasizing the need for inclusive, well-publicized, and participatory art events to maximize the impact and appreciation of the arts.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS ON THE STATE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAM

The policy establishing the National Arts Month (NAM) aimed to promote awareness, engagement, and appreciation of the arts across various sectors. Based on respondents' feedback, the initiative has made progress but still requires enhancements to achieve its full potential. The emphasis on increasing publicity and awareness suggests that NAM remains relatively under-recognized among certain audiences. Research indicates that visibility through multiple channels, such as social media, school announcements, and community outreach, significantly boosts participation (Jones, 2023). This aligns with respondents' calls for more aggressive promotion, suggesting that while the policy has laid a foundation, more efforts are needed to ensure widespread awareness.

Additionally, the feedback highlights the importance of expanding engagement and diversifying artistic

experiences, key objectives of NAM. Respondents proposed interactive activities such as workshops, exhibits, and mentorships with established artists, reinforcing research that hands-on participation enhances artistic appreciation (Smith et al., 2022; Gonzalez & Rivera, 2021). However, if the policy's goal was to foster broad and sustained artistic involvement, the continued demand for such initiatives suggests that its implementation may be falling short. The need for more dedicated art spaces and community collaborations further supports this, as access to such opportunities has been linked to increased participation in cultural events (Turner, 2020; Delgado, 2019).

While NAM has contributed to elevating the role of arts in education and community engagement, the feedback suggests that the policy has yet to fully realize its intended impact. The recurring recommendations for increased visibility, diversified experiences, and stronger community involvement indicate that while the foundation is in place, ongoing efforts are needed to refine and expand its implementation. Strengthening partnerships, securing sustainable funding, and ensuring continuous assessment of the program's reach and effectiveness will be crucial in determining whether NAM can fully meet its policy objectives in the long run.

DISCUSSION

To enhance the NAM celebration at SPU Manila, it is essential to align activities with both the university's core values—Christ-centeredness, charity, commitment to mission, charism, and community—and the preferences of college students regarding how they wish to celebrate art. By integrating Catholic Social Teachings (CST) and student interests, the celebration can become more meaningful, engaging, and impactful.

Making Art More Recognizable and Accessible

Many students expressed a desire for more visibility and engagement in the NAM celebration. To address this, SPU Manila can expand its use of social media and digital platforms by featuring virtual art galleries, student interviews, and behind-the-scenes content on the school's official pages. This aligns with CST's call for solidarity, ensuring that art reaches a broader audience, including those who may not traditionally engage with artistic activities. Additionally, students suggested art circles and interactive exhibits—which can be implemented by setting up pop-up galleries across campus, encouraging spontaneous participation and appreciation.

Showcasing Student Talent and Encouraging Engagement

Students emphasized the importance of recognition and participation in art-related events. To support this, SPU Manila can host an "Art and Faith Festival", where students showcase their talents in painting, music, dance, spoken word poetry, and digital arts, with themes centered on faith, human dignity, and social justice. The university can also organize an "Art for a Cause" exhibit, where students donate or auction their works to support charitable organizations, environmental sustainability efforts, or scholarships for underprivileged youth. This aligns with CST's preferential option for the poor, ensuring that art is not only for self-expression but also a means to uplift others.

Meeting National Artists and Learning from Experts

Some students suggested bringing in National Artists or professional mentors to inspire and guide them in their artistic journeys. SPU Manila can collaborate with local artists, Catholic art organizations, and alumni practitioners to offer masterclasses, mentorship programs, and live demonstrations. This would allow students to deepen their artistic skills while reinforcing their faith and values, ensuring that their work serves a higher purpose. A career fair for artists can also help students explore vocational paths in the creative industry while remaining true to Paulinian values of service and mission.

Encouraging Artistic Expression Through Social Advocacy

Many students believe that art should be used to amplify voices and create awareness about important social issues. In response, SPU Manila can introduce an "Art and Social Change" campaign, where students create

murals, digital storytelling projects, and performance pieces that highlight themes of justice, peace, and the environment. A special spoken word and visual art event can feature poetry, photography, and film that reflect Catholic teachings on human dignity, care for creation, and respect for life.

Expanding Opportunities for Art Appreciation

To ensure that all students—whether artists or art enthusiasts—feel included, the university can organize an "Interactive NAM", where students can participate in collaborative art projects, guided museum tours, and art appreciation forums. Since some students noted they were not yet fully aware of NAM, SPU Manila can improve publicity and engagement by using multi-platform announcements (social media, posters, classroom discussions, and student organizations) to generate excitement and participation.

By aligning the NAM celebration with the preferences of SPU Manila college students, while staying true to Catholic Social Teachings and Paulinian values, these initiatives ensure that the event is not just a celebration of creativity but also a platform for spiritual growth, community engagement, and social transformation.

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