

Paving a Path to Essentialize an “Imagined” Community: Inquiring the Contemporary Music Culture in the Digital Age through Virtual Ethnography

Chow Ow Wei*

Abstract: This paper regards internet users who “convene” in moderated groups according to a common interest, social attachment, or other multiple intersected connections as an “imagined” community that surfaces on a social networking platform. The validity of the community, especially when being of an ethnographer’s interest, is argued through a documentation of responses captured and operated as ethnographic data. This is a preliminary study of music culture in the digital age through online survey as virtual ethnography to explore a glimpse of the reality via reactions of an “imagined” community. Through a systematic and critical presentation of the ethnographic data, music culture in the contemporary time is interpreted as a trajectory which significantly essentializes an “imagined community” as genuine as a physical field site in the light of cultural musicology.

Keywords: imagined community; digital music culture; virtual ethnography; the internet; social network

Introduction

The internet is unquestionably regarded as one of the most intriguing revolutions in human technology. It has risen as an important communication tool only within a few decades of development—theorized in the 1960s, constructed in the 1970s, emerged in the 1990s and most significantly, inseparable from the urban lifestyle in the twenty-first century—and still, it is leading the trends that expansively define a modern life for humankind. One of the many drastic changes in twenty-first-century lifestyle is the phenomenon that modern people, especially urbanites, lavish their dependency on the internet to obtain the convenience of a variety of accessible services that range from a mundane

* Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.

inquiry on the weather forecast to a call for a banking transaction. When Web 2.0, an interactive social software signifying “a cultural shift in how web pages were developed, designed, and used” (Morrow 2014), was realized in 2002, internet users experienced a radical change as the internet dramatically transformed human–human interaction with the crowd-sourced innovation in communication technology. It has enabled data to be inserted, used, and modified with user-friendly authorizing means—despite causing possible fear in certain skeptics with its sudden, intrusive prevalence in daily life.

As the internet trend evolves to the next level called Web 3.0 or the Semantic Web (Shadbolt et al. 2006) and beyond toward the Internet of Things (Fell 2014; Mattern and Floerkemeier 2010; Mitew 2012), changes in contemporary music culture are preordained: people nowadays significantly shift from physical and analog toward virtual cultural artifacts. They intensely rely on internet media to access music (Beer 2008: 223). More than a decade ago, they no longer buy CDs but download digitally compressed music files from the internet or “rip” audio music from the CD, audio tapes and vinyl records, instigating “the death of the CD, home taping practices or DJ culture”¹ (Farugia and Swiss 2005; McLeod 2005); after the mid-2010s, they simply need subscriptions from fast-speed, wireless, mobile data networks and digital service providers that allow the consumption of streamed music “trivially simple” on digital platforms (Towse 2020: 1462). Internet users no longer solely learn from tutors but utilize the YouTube repository; they discuss shared interests, tastes on social network sites with “like-minded” people whom they have never actually met (Beer 2008: 224); they are “befriending” performers and celebrities, and get involved in promotional campaigns within the collaborative functions of the internet (Beer 2008: 224); they watch and share live performances from gigs they have never actually attended (Beer 2008: 229–30); and they can even compose and publish music on an internet-streamed platform that “display identifiable aspects of participation and interaction” (Hagen 2015: 88) with no involvement of music labels at all.

User-generated data that are collected and utilized by internet users cannot be made available without the participation of internet users who surface on the social network as an “imagined community.”² Members of this “imagined community” could acquire more than ordinary benefits from an “ocean” of information on the internet by accessing to unlimited video entertainment, performing mundane payment transactions, acquiring the unknown knowledge as much, and getting known to strangers as well. Once getting “online” in the “virtual” environment, they are able to maintain anonymity and “occupy numerous, even contradictory social positions and inhabit multiple, overlapping communities simultaneously” (Warf and Grimes 1997: 270), bringing their virtual engagement toward bigger ventures, such as online activism (Yang 2013: 32–3) or non-mainstream journalism³ (Lotan et al. 2011: 1382–3). In the most common social scenario via web devices, they “gather” in moderated

groups according to a common interest, social attachment or other multiple intersected connection—in both real life or virtual terms—and act, react and interact in a spatially and temporally remote manner; in other words, they can operate their virtual lives “anytime” and “anywhere.” Moreover, in today’s internet world the platformization of online contents, including music-making and its consumption, is formulated to decide how “creative laborers” and “audiences” are connected, engaged—or even tangled—with common interests and profits or deals, as the relationship between a “creator” and the “audience” is complicated by the algorithmic design of the platform (Fung et al. 2022: 383).

The Design of a Virtual Ethnography: Its Problems and Solutions

This study is an extension of a doctoral dissertation by the author who explored the phenomenal and virtual views on music related to Buddhism in twenty-first-century Malaysia (Chow 2016).⁴ Adopting a qualitative method, the dissertation employed a contemporary view of virtual ethnography by Christine Hine (2000), besides significantly operating on data sources as a way of knowing with a combination of qualitative analytical methods, such as discourse analysis, hermeneutic phenomenology, metaphorical analysis, ethnostatistics, and music analysis (Chow 2016: 12–13).⁵

This study maintains the aforementioned methodology to operate data collected from an “imagined community” on the subject of music culture and chooses to focus on the experience of live musical productions in a musical theatre, the virtual experience, and religious views, all of which involve internet users. With a concern for interpreting music culture in the internet age through the means of virtual ethnography, this paper only presents data from an online survey that explores how an “imagined community” experiences live musical productions⁶. Predictable arguments against the research design, which is somewhat different from conventional ethnography, revolve around how an ethnographic object is established and how that object is authentically known. Hine (2000) considers the fundamental areas of ethnographic thinking⁷ in her study of the internet and details a set of ten principles in virtual ethnography that can provide a feasible solution, as summarized below:

1. The internet is deemed “problematic” and can be operated and maintained in the ways in which it is “used, interpreted and reinterpreted.”
2. Never being seen as a detached space from any connections to real life and face-to-face interaction, the internet is indeed “both culture and cultural artifact” that should be understood jointly and “acquired, learnt, interpreted and incorporated into context” with a high degree of interpretive flexibility.

3. The emergence of mediated interaction is useful in “the making and remaking of space through mediated interactions” as in the ethnographic approach; therefore, an ethnography is deemed as “mobile” and not as located in specific places or even as “multi-sited.”
4. Since “culture and community are not self-evidently located in place then neither is ethnography,” an ethnographic object should be essentially reshaped by following the flow and connectivity rather than accentuating the location and boundary as the organizing principle.
5. While the concept of ethnography [and/or culture] as “having natural boundaries” is discarded for analytic purposes, the *a priori* assumption of boundaries is always confronted as boundaries and connections are dynamically defined as the ethnographic object itself; they can be “re-formulated with each decision to either follow yet another connection or retrace steps to a previous point,” depending practically on “the embodied ethnographer’s constraints in time, space, and ingenuity.”
6. Temporal dislocation comes with spatial dislocation and an ethnographer’s engagement with mediated contexts is traversed into his interactivity in other spheres and media. As a result, “the immersion in the setting” of the ethnographer is only “intermittently achieved.”
7. Virtual ethnography is “necessarily partial” for the reason that a holistic narrative of any “preexisting, isolable and describable” informant, locale and culture is impossible to achieve. This approach is based on “ideas of strategic relevance” rather than “faithful representations of objective realities.”
8. The establishment of interaction, either with informants by the technology or of the ethnographer with the technology, is part of the ethnography. A new reflexive dimension to explore the use of the medium in context is created as an insight when an ethnographer is intensively engaged with the medium since he is also acting as an informant interacting with the technology.
9. With technology-mediated interaction, informants, as well as the ethnographer, establish a sort of relationship that enables them to be both “absent” and “present” within the ethnography across temporal and spatial dislocations. The making of an ethnographic object, which is made possible by the available technologies, is the ethnography “in, of and through the virtual.” All forms of interaction, face-to-face or virtual, are therefore “ethnographically valid.”
10. As “virtuality” indicates “not quite,” it is sufficient to apply for practical purposes even if the “real” is not strictly represented. Virtual ethnography is an “adaptive ethnography” that “sets out to suit itself to the conditions in which it finds itself,” therefore it is sufficient for practical purposes to explore the connectivity of mediated interactions even if not being the “real” thing “in methodologically purist terms.” (Hine 2000: 63–5)

With these principles, the ethnographic object could be established and authentically known, despite the seemingly problematic operation of virtual life at “anytime” and “anywhere.” The temporal and spatial characteristics of the field site, which is conventionally regarded as a physically bounded area at the specific time of the ethnographic study, are subsequently undermined in virtual ethnography when it becomes a heterogeneous, non-field-based network for ethnographers. It brings on “a realization that the field site is in certain ways constructed rather than discovered is crucial to contemporary practice” (Burrell 2009: 182). The field site of this study cannot be located but only be constructed by configuration as a “network” comprising “fixed and moving points including spaces, people, and objects” (Burrell 2009: 189). It is constructed as a continuous space which no longer “presume proximity or even spatiality in a physical sense” (Burrell 2009: 189–90).

Meanwhile, all respondents who have contributed data in the ethnography are part of an “imagined community,” whose knowledge on the subject is not determined by demographic particulars such as age, gender, race, and nationality (Chow 2016: 15). While maintaining their anonymity during data submission, they mainly consist of staff and students of the Music Department of Universiti Putra Malaysia whom the author approached face-to-face, and personal connections that the author invited electronically. It also included the social networks of participating respondents who spread the invitation via channels of email and social media. Nevertheless, the validity of this “community,” especially of ethnographic interest, can be established with the trails of the data source that was captured in cyberspace as ethnographic data. These data, as shown in Table 1, include an internet provider address, responding date and time, and responding duration.

Table 1. An “imagined community” made known: Metadata of respondents of the online survey on how they experienced live musical production

Sequence of Respondent	Data Collector	Internet Provider Address	Responding Date and Time	Response Duration
1	Web Link 1	119.40.112.96	12 Nov 2014, 6:32:52 PM	53’ 14”
2	Web Link 1	119.40.112.96	12 Nov 2014, 6:51:49 PM	9’ 39”
3	Web Link 1	119.40.112.96	12 Nov 2014, 7:57:03 PM	11’ 58’ 40”
4	Web Link 1	119.40.112.96	12 Nov 2014, 8:14:11 PM	9’ 53”
5	Web Link 1	175.136.170.231	12 Nov 2014, 9:42:42 PM	17’ 16”
6	Web Link 1	125.224.116.235	12 Nov 2014, 10:35:06 PM	3’ 27”

Sequence of Respondent	Data Collector	Internet Provider Address	Responding Date and Time	Response Duration
7	Web Link 1	210.195.203.233	12 Nov 2014, 10:49:27 PM	9' 6"
8	Web Link 1	118.163.247.89	12 Nov 2014, 11:45:29 PM	4' 5"
9	Web Link 1	118.101.223.121	13 Nov 2014, 12:07:51 AM	22' 16"
10	Web Link 1	175.140.171.153	13 Nov 2014, 6:18:53 AM	10' 24"
11	Web Link 1	170.38.99.34	13 Nov 2014, 7:22:47 AM	9' 34"
12	Web Link 1	57.73.135.225	13 Nov 2014, 8:29:16 AM	4' 37"
13	Web Link 1	121.121.63.189	13 Nov 2014, 10:38:43 AM	4' 49"
14	Web Link 1	211.25.230.47	13 Nov 2014, 10:59:51 AM	36' 16"
15	Web Link 1	115.134.138.61	13 Nov 2014, 3:34:59 PM	14' 24"
16	Web Link 1	115.134.252.236	13 Nov 2014, 11:31:15 PM	9' 47"
17	Web Link 1	57.73.135.225	14 Nov 2014, 10:20:40 AM	24' 22"
18	Web Link 1	60.50.245.188	14 Nov 2014, 10:58:27 AM	27' 48"
19	Web Link 1	125.7.91.251	14 Nov 2014, 11:15:48 AM	3' 17"
20	Web Link 1	115.135.98.226	14 Nov 2014, 11:43:07 AM	5' 10"
21	Web Link 1	60.48.81.126	14 Nov 2014, 12:11:38 PM	1' 47"
22	Web Link 1	211.25.230.47	14 Nov 2014, 5:43:44 PM	2' 36"
23	Web Link 1	115.164.210.85	14 Nov 2014, 6:22:02 PM	over 24°
24	Web Link 1	203.106.149.10	14 Nov 2014, 6:23:44 PM	over 24°
25	Web Link 1	42.60.120.10	14 Nov 2014, 7:56:25 PM	37' 9"
26	Web Link 1	210.195.101.192	15 Nov 2014, 8:08:43 AM	7' 18"
27	Web Link 1	14.1.210.179	17 Nov 2014, 12:26:15 AM	4' 14"
28	Web Link 1	219.92.106.24	17 Nov 2014, 10:26:40 AM	4' 13"
29	Web Link 1	119.40.112.2	17 Nov 2014, 4:03:24 PM	11' 20"

30	Web Link 1	119.40.112.2	17 Nov 2014, 4:04:10 PM	12' 6"
31	Web Link 1	119.40.112.66	18 Nov 2014, 1:46:56 PM	9' 11"
32	Web Link 1	1.9.103.246	19 Nov 2014, 6:59:56 PM	5' 28"
33	Web Link 1	88.107.227.237	19 Nov 2014, 11:14:23 PM	9' 10"
34	Web Link 1	183.171.173.192	20 Nov 2014, 9:57:21 AM	9' 38"
35	Web Link 1	121.120.121.36	20 Nov 2014, 11:49:55 AM	12' 7"
36	Web Link 1	121.123.252.162	20 Nov 2014, 9:13:09 PM	6' 18"
37	Web Link 1	14.1.210.47	21 Nov 2014, 7:55:56 AM	5' 10"
38	Web Link 1	175.140.89.34	21 Nov 2014, 8:17:50 AM	3' 45"
39	Web Link 1	202.160.0.5	21 Nov 2014, 2:34:01 PM	9' 7"
40	Web Link 1	60.51.107.58	21 Nov 2014, 2:51:39 PM	8' 2"
41	Web Link 1	171.96.182.41	21 Nov 2014, 3:09:20 PM	16' 57"
42	Web Link 1	115.134.160.57	21 Nov 2014, 10:23:25 PM	3' 3' 5"
43	Web Link 1	175.136.4.28	22 Nov 2014, 12:32:59 AM	10' 11"
44	Web Link 1	115.135.157.155	22 Nov 2014, 5:18:16 PM	6' 42"
45	Web Link 1	175.144.57.224	23 Nov 2014, 11:46:36 PM	4' 37"
46	Web Link 1	211.25.235.129	24 Nov 2014, 9:38:53 AM	6' 29"
47	Web Link 1	175.143.238.89	24 Nov 2014, 9:55:43 PM	4' 43"
48	Web Link 1	58.26.151.252	25 Nov 2014, 12:39:51 PM	5' 23"
49	Web Link 1	210.195.37.142	29 Nov 2014, 11:47:11 AM	8' 59"
50	Web Link 1	202.170.57.247	9 Dec 2014, 11:31:26 AM	3' 49"
51	Web Link 1	115.135.38.147	20 Mar 2015, 5:21:15 AM	2' 12"

Table 2. Topics of the online survey and their uniform resource locations

Data Set	Topic of Online Survey	Uniform Resource Location (URL)
1	Survey on Experiencing Live Musical Production	https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/XJCWZ95
2	Survey on Virtual Experience	https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/79T38F3
3	Survey on Religious Views	https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MZLFLD6

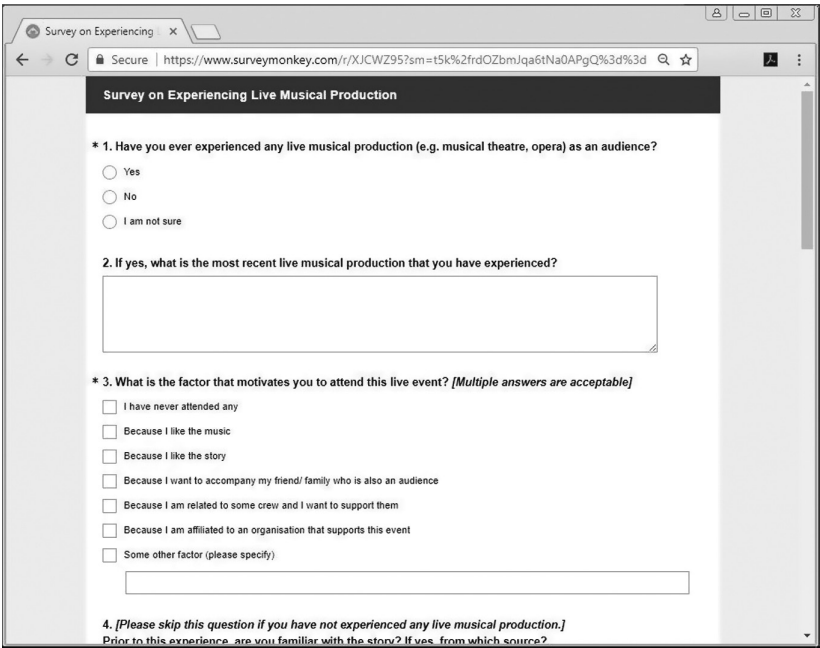


Figure 1. A screenshot of the web interface of the first set of the questionnaire.

The method of this study is based on three sets of questionnaires which were made accessible to the respondents through a hyperlink from email and mediated social networking software, namely Facebook and WhatsApp. As illustrated in Table 2, each set of questionnaires that contains ten questions of assorted formats was visualized within the layout of an online survey website called SurveyMonkey⁸ (Figure 1). Despite collecting metadata from respondents during submission, this website serves as a handy computation tool that processes data collection and analysis simultaneously while the results can

be continuously updated at any point on the timeline. The survey was made publicly accessible on November 12, 2014 and ran until March 20, 2015. A submission of fifty-one responses in total was recorded.

This paper aims to discuss exclusively the first data set of the questionnaire that was designed to gather views from respondents on the subject of how they experienced live musical productions. With all responses systematically presented and critically acknowledged, it is hoped to understand and interpret a connection between music culture and urban lifestyle in the digital sense.

Responses to 10 Questions on How “an Imagined Community” Experienced Live Musical Production

Q1: Have you ever experienced any live musical production (e.g., musical theatre, opera) as an audience?

[51 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

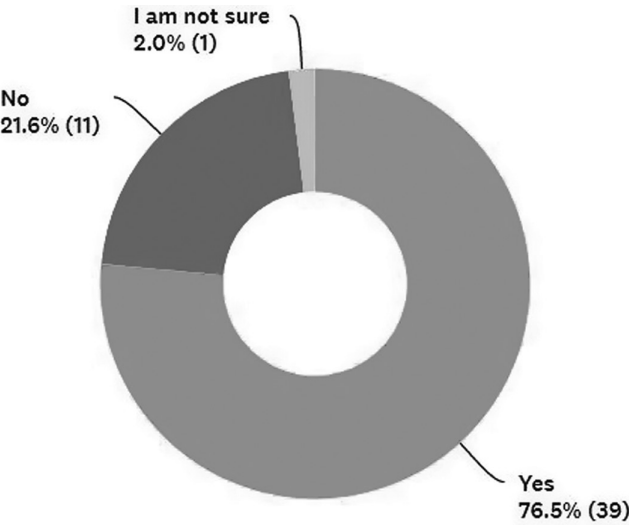


Figure 2. Chart showing the relational proportions between response data for Q1.

Table 3. The relational proportions between response data for Q1

Answering Choices	Responses	
Yes	76.5 %	39
No	21.6 %	11
I am not sure	2.0 %	1
Total	100.0 %	51

Q2: If yes, what is the most recent live musical production that you have experienced?
[39 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

Table 4. Specific responses for Q2

All comments:		
■ Bizet’s “Carmen”	7	
■ “L’elisir d’amore”	3	
■ “Xuan Zang: The Journey to the West”	3	
■ “Bugsy Malone”	1	
■ Concert by Kembara	1	
■ Concert by Morteza Pashaei (Tehran, Iran)	1	
■ “Dawn” (musical)	1	
■ “I Have a Date with Spring”	1	
■ “If There’re Seasons...” (天冷就回來)	1	
■ “Impression: Liu Sanjie” (Guilin, China)	1	
■ “Incantations”	1	
■ “KL Mud”	1	
■ “Love of Su Su and Xiu Lung”	1	
■ “Mamma Mia”	1	
■ “Ombak”	1	
■ “Ramayana”	1	
■ “Sinbad”	1	
■ “The Kitchen”	1	
■ “The Wedding Singer”	1	
■ Unspecified music/drama performance	10	

Q3: What is the factor that motivates you to attend this live event? *[Multiple answers are acceptable]*
[85 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

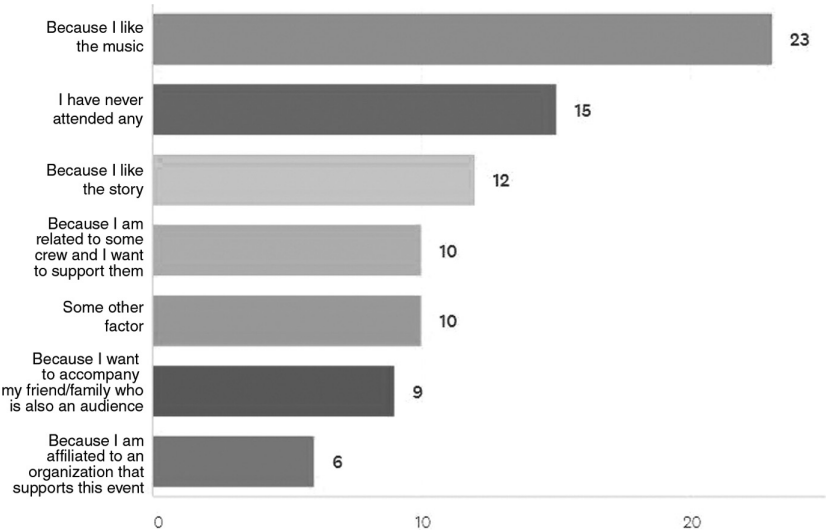


Figure 3. Chart showing specific responses for Q3.

Table 5. Specific responses for Q3

Answering Choices	Responses* ⁹	
Because I like the music	45.1 %	23
I have never attended any	29.4 %	15
Because I like the story	23.5 %	12
Because I am related to some crew and I want to support them	19.6 %	10
Because I want to accompany my friend/family who is also an audience	17.6 %	9
Because I am affiliated to an organization that supports this event	11.8 %	6
Some other factor <i>[please specify]</i> :	19.6 %	10
■ The need to complete an assignment/task		4
■ Pastime/hobby		2
■ Support as a fan		2
■ Professional need		1
■ Personal exposure		1

Q4: *[Please skip this question if you have not experienced any live musical production.]*

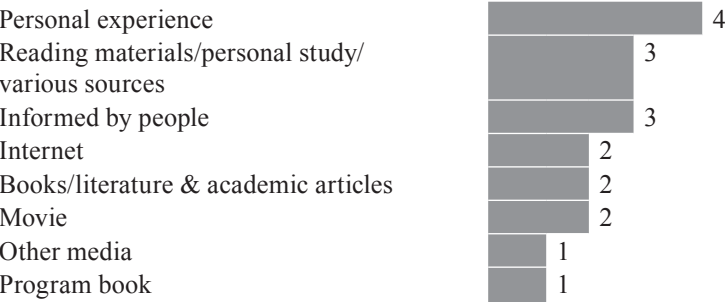
Prior to this experience, are you familiar with the story? If yes, from which source?

[35 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

Table 6. Specific responses for Q4

- No [17 or 48.6 %]
- Yes [18 or 51.4 %]

All comments:



Q5: *[Please skip this question if you have not experienced any live musical production.]*

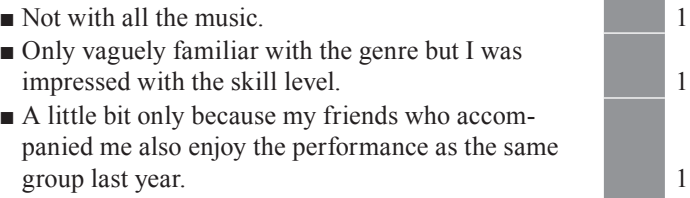
Prior to this experience, are you familiar with the music? If yes, from which source?

[35 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

Table 7. Partial specific responses for Q5

- No [13 or 37.1 %]
- Vaguely [3 or 8.6 %]

All comments:



• Yes [19 or 54.3 %]	
All comments:	
Personal experience	8
Personal study/various sources	3
Movie	2
Informed by people	2
“Same as above”	2
Radio and television	1
YouTube	1

Q6: *[Please skip this question if you have not experienced any live musical production.]*

Do you think music is important to present a story like this?

[35 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]


■ No, at the same status as story.	1
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Table 8. Partial specific responses for Q6

• No [1 or ≈2.9 %]	
■ No, at the same status as story.	1
• Maybe [1 or ≈2.9 %]	
All comments:	
■ It depends, I think it is only necessary to attract different types of audiences.	1
• Yes [32 or 91.4 %]	
Selected comments:	
■ It helps create the right atmosphere for each scene.	1
■ Music can actually play a key role in presenting a story like this.	1
■ Music carries the story itself.	1
■ Very important. Without the music the mood and nostalgic effect of the story would not be enhanced.	1
■ Not for the story. But for the musical.	1
■ But this musical is the other way round, the songs first and they create the story based on the songs, similar to “Mamma Mia.”	1
■ Music may help to perform the story more effectively.	1

• Not applicable [1 or ≈2.9 %]

All comments:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| ■ There is no story in music performance... just music. |  | 1 |
|---|---|---|

Q7: *[Please skip this question if you have not experienced any live musical production.]*

What is the lasting impression the event has left to you after experiencing the live event?







[35 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

Table 9. Partial specific responses for Q7

• Nothing impressive [1 or 2.9 %]









• With non-specific impression [6 or 17.1 %]

All comments:



- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Satisfied. |  | 1 |
| ■ Shocked (震撼). |  | 1 |
| ■ Awesome. |  | 1 |
| ■ Feel amazed and happy. |  | 1 |
| ■ Quite enjoy. |  | 1 |
| ■ I felt a little sad, but hopeful also, that anything can be done (for the dying musician in the performance). |  | 1 |

• With specific impression [28 or 80.0 %]

All comments:













- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ■ Amazing performance. |  | 1 |
| ■ Quality of the performance and concern with the location of seats/venue of performance should be reconsidered by the organizers. |  | 1 |
| ■ It is colorful. |  | 1 |
| ■ The acting, staging, costumes, anything that is more visual. |  | 1 |
| ■ Expression of Mr. Mak Chi Hoe (the performer). |  | 1 |
| ■ The charismatic art performance by the director. |  | 1 |
| ■ The story was touching, audio & visual effects are great! The main thing is all singers sound great with good showmanship (very expressive)! |  | 1 |
| ■ Great sound system and love the group singing. |  | 1 |

■ Excellent stage management. Some language confusion.	1
■ Cooperate with live band.	1
■ Nice music.	1
■ Music is essential to the production both as a soundtrack and extra-textual referencing of the narrative being performed.	1
■ Happy and lively, music seems to play all around wherever I go. It's the effect after a good show.	1
■ The melody keeps on ringing in my head and I even sang along with the song.	1
■ The musical aspect and lasting friendship that live through years. Time might be cruel that the actors may not look young enough to carry out the character anymore but music survives through.	1
■ Music does not fit to the story.	1
■ The singing voices.	1
■ Extremely good intonation.	1
■ I was reminded that singing is an extremely challenging skill.	1
■ The quality of the overall presentation and the outstanding singing and orchestra.	1
■ It's an eye opener for me that a story can present through music performance as well.	1
■ Impressive of watching local people singing and acting something foreign to them and matching well with live orchestra.	1
■ Sensorial and communal aspects of live performances are such that cannot be truly duplicated through recordings.	1
■ People can imagine the performance ways by five senses including music/percussion and smelling.	1
■ As a spectator, this was my first experience with a Buddhist musical. I was quite shocked after encountering the scenes in which Buddhist monks were dancing. As I was grown up in a Theravada Buddhist society, I have an impression that the people behind the stage have not completely understood what the actual concept of Buddhism is.	1
■ Their creativity, the props, music and the way they performed.	1

■ The cohesiveness of all the different elements within the musical itself.		1
■ It includes audience interaction.		1

Q8: Do you prefer to watch a musical production live or through audiovisual/
internet media? Why?
[51 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

Table 10. Partial specific responses for Q8

• Prefer audiovisual/internet media [7 or 13.7 %]		
All comments:		
■ Live, realistic and raw audiovisual/internet. Easy access.		1
■ Flexibility and affordability.		1
■ Because (we) can relax our mind at home.		1
■ Due to convenience.		1
■ As I can pause or stop watching.		1
■ Because I can repeat it as many times as I want.		1
■ Because I can watch or listen anytime it suits me.		1
• Not particular [6 or 11.8 %]		
All comments:		
■ Both.		1
■ It depends.		1
■ Depends on the reality situations. It's flexible.		1
■ It depends. I prefer live for experiencing the music for the “live experience” (watching chemistry between musicians the venue, being part of an audience); but audiovisual/internet media for studying the music because I can replay it many times.		1
■ I prefer to watch live if it is very special to me (I somehow find a way to get there with any condition). Mostly, I am lazy to visit live performances if it is troublesome to get there, mostly for reasons such as long distance, traffic jam, and inconvenient medium (overloaded buses and trains).		1

■ Actually both. I prefer to pay more and watch my favorite performers live on the stage, and pay less and watch other musical pieces that could make me interested later from the internet/media. Then after that if I become interested, I would go and watch them live.	1
• Prefer live [38 or 74.5 %]	
Selected comments:	
■ More enjoyable.	1
■ More real.	1
■ Because it's more real to me.	1
■ Because I prefer to see real stuff with my own eyes.	1
■ I enjoy the audio & visual effects live. It's real!	1
■ We can experience the reality!	1
■ We can feel the emotions better. If watched through media, it feels staged or rather recorded.	1
■ The experience is much more fulfilling and (surreal).	1
■ Sound effect (like experiencing the real environment) (身歷其境).	1
■ More lively and you can feel the environment better.	1
■ It creates the environment and atmosphere that you will never gain from other.	1
■ Live, easier to get myself into the music.	1
■ Live, as an audience. I like live musical instrument sounding, and as an audio production team is because of the coordination with sound and stage performance.	1
■ It gave us better musical sense and effects.	1
■ Because in temporary art forms not only visual and hearing.	1
■ More connected with the actor.	1
■ Something visceral and chemical happens between the performer and the audience during a live session.	1
■ See and feel better. Especially coordination of performers on stage and interactions with audiences.	1
■ Every moment is a creation and the energy flows between performers and crew changes from show to show. It will never be the same twice. That's the amazing part of it. Just like the cosmos... constantly changing. It's just more touching to watch someone sing live to you.	1

■ The feeling of attending a live event is totally different. Sound effect, lighting effect, acoustic, communication between performers and audiences. These things cannot be experienced through audiovisual/internet media.	1
■ I can experience the great sound system and the excitement of the audience.	1
■ Because the audio and visual are more realistic than the recording ones.	1
■ The acoustic, sound quality & atmosphere are different.	1
■ Can never get the same sound and visual impact through audiovisual/internet media.	1
■ Live because of acoustic submersion versus sonic media- ted recording.	1
■ I prefer to watch it live so that I can be more satisfied with the sound projection.	1
■ Music production is made to be seen live for the first instance. Media can only help my memory.	1
■ Of course, I prefer to watch live if time and finances allowed.	1
■ It is meant to watch live and to experience the excitement of the story and also to see any imperfections of the event.	1
■ I might prefer live but I never attended any and I think it must be great to experience on the spot.	1

Q9: What would be the reason for you to watch a musical production through audiovisual/internet media?*[Multiple answers are acceptable]*
[160 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

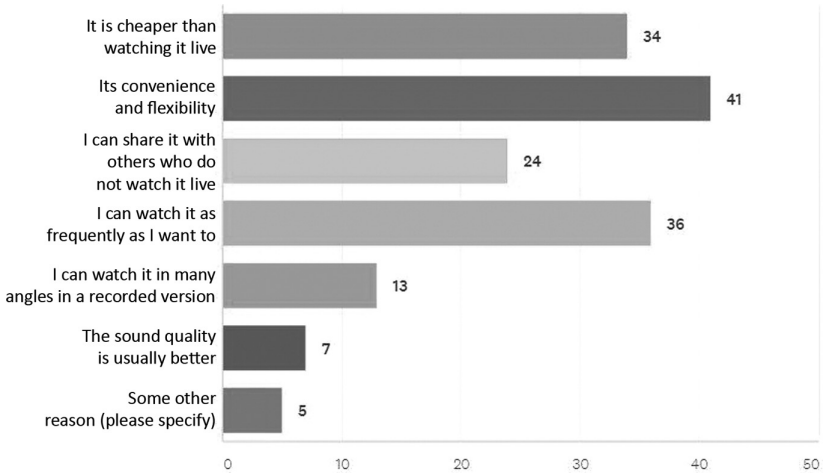


Figure 4. A chart showing specific responses for Q9.

Table 11. Specific responses for Q9

Answering Choices	Responses*	
It is cheaper than watching it live	66.7 %	34
Its convenience and flexibility: I can watch it anytime and anywhere on a device	80.4 %	41
I can share it with others who do not watch it live	47.1 %	24
I can watch it as frequently as I want to	70.6 %	36
I can watch it in many angles in a recorded version	25.5 %	13
The sound quality is usually engineered better in a recorded version	13.7 %	7
Something else <i>[please specify]</i> :	9.8 %	5
■ Limitation in mobility		2
■ If I want to study the production in detail.		1
■ For teaching purposes.		1
■ I can watch during my free times. However, I am not a big fan of musicals.		1

Q10: Would you post photos of a live musical production that you have experienced on the internet media? Why, or why not?

[51 responses from 51 respondents were recorded]

Table 12. Specific responses for Q10

• No [22 or 43.1 %]

Selected comments:

■ I do not think of any reason to post the photos.	1
■ I feel it is a waste of time to do so.	1
■ Organizers do not allow the audience to take pictures.	1
■ Because it is copyrighted.	1
■ As to respect of their hard work.	1
■ Usually, it's not permitted and I prefer to focus on the live performance.	1
■ Not my habit. I prefer to focus on enjoying the performance than recording it. I believe in the intellectual property rights of the artists.	1
■ I don't have such interest or habit.	1
■ I didn't take any photo.	1
■ Not used to it.	1
■ I do not enjoy posting photos of personal activities on internet.	1
■ Normally I don't take photos. If photos taken, I just do not like to share it out in internet media.	1
■ Normally I don't share my personal experience/photos on the internet.	1
■ I am not skillful.	1
■ Music is a personal matter.	1
■ It sounds stupid because everybody is able to get the photo through the internet.	1
■ I would not because it did not explain anything (just another performance). Maybe I would post the poster of the performance. This might help someone whom would like to watch such performance. At least he or she would know where, who, and what are to be staged.	1
■ I prefer to keep it for myself.	1
■ The photos are for my own collection.	1

• Maybe/Not particular [8 or 15.7 %]

All comments:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ No particular preference. | 1 |
| ■ I have not posted yet as I have not watched live musicals much. The musicals I watched were not allowed to photograph or to videotape. Therefore I did not have many chances. If I have got photos, I would share them on Facebook. By doing so, I want to let others know what I have experienced what they have missed. | 1 |
| ■ I am not sure I watch any live musical production. Maybe I will post at the beginning, later I will like to focus then I would not be busy on taking photo. | 1 |
| ■ Depends on my mood. Usually not because I think nobody cares for what I watch. | 1 |
| ■ Maybe. | 1 |
| ■ Maybe. If (it is) visually really great, why not? | 1 |
| ■ Maybe just the before and after show photos as most of the time photography is prohibited during performance. As a respect to all, photography during the play will be definitely disturbing. | 1 |
| ■ Not sure about the live musical production. Usually I will share music videos on YouTube. | 1 |

• Yes [21 or 41.2 %]

Selected comments:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ (I) Can share and promote the production. | 1 |
| ■ I would, because I would like to share the experience I had with my friends. This is to encourage them to go and watch it as well. | 1 |
| ■ Yes, I might. To show off maybe, or try to introduce an artist to others. | 1 |
| ■ To show my determination on music never stops and just to share with others who stops being involved in music. | 1 |
| ■ Yes, if it was appropriate to the public domain. | 1 |
| ■ Yes, if it is permitted to take photos and to share with my friends who have no opportunity to attend it. | 1 |
| ■ If I think others should watch it, I will. But I will not put anything that has copyright issues or just for fun. | 1 |
| ■ To share with my friends. | 1 |
| ■ To share with others. | 1 |

■ For sharing with friends and those who share the same interest.	1
■ Yes, am just used of sharing.	1
■ Because it's something special to be shared.	1
■ To share music with the world.	1
■ This helps me create a memory of the events that I have experienced.	1
■ Because all these are a great experience to me and I want to remember them.	1
■ My good memories that I want to share with my friends and families (and a few years later for myself).	1
■ Social media spread information regarding musical talents, and many musical moments that would have otherwise existed only in their own fleeting moment of creation are preserved through visual and audio means for generations of future music lovers and aspiring musicians to enjoy.	1
■ If I'm allowed to take photos during the show, I would share it on social media to tell people how good it is and I'm proud to be watching it live.	1
■ To let people around me know that it is interesting to watch live.	1

Music Culture in New Digitalization: The Known Versus the Unknown

Amidst the new digitalization that is trending in all aspects of urban life, it is assumed that contemporary music culture involves both real and virtual experiences in music that a person can achieve simultaneously. Therefore, this questionnaire delves into how people experienced a live musical production and their awareness of watching the show live or through media. Questions 1–7 inquired about their most recent live musical experience, reasons for attendance, their understanding of the music, the story, the role of music in a musical show, and the lasting impression of the show. Questions 8–10 reflect their preferences on watching a musical show virtually through media and their tendency in becoming media agents who are involved in the mobile distribution networks that rely heavily on the functionality of the “imagined community.”

The majority of the respondents have experienced a live musical production before.¹⁰ Though the music is not always the main attraction for their attendance, most have more than one reason to attend the show. Half became familiar with the story or the music prior to the performance, while most agreed that music is important to present the story in a musical show. In 35 responses

to Question 7 on what the lasting impression of the show is about, four fifths specify being impressed with various enjoyable artistic aspects in the live performance, as there are 15 responses particularly expressing admiration for the sound, music, or vocal elements.

Concerning the preference of watching a show live or through media as in Question 8, three quarters would rather see a real performance mainly for a directly connected experience that differs from the experience through media. However, as media rises as an increasingly convenient alternative in the consumption of music performance, the feedback by one fourth is significant because it shapes a new music culture. The flexibility of time and space, the convenience of playback facility, and affordability—all cater to modern urbanites within the existence of a media sphere—have gradually become determining criteria of attendance to an actual concert hall or musical theatre. Responses to Question 9 confirm these criteria with positive, supporting figures. Almost half of the respondents are used to the idea of “online sharing” with people who do not actually attend the show. Finally, responses to Question 10 imply the most intriguing fact in music culture, or perhaps the most provoking ambiguity in the ethics of virtual interactions, that more than half of the respondents agree to, or take no principal stance in the notion of posting photos of a live musical production on the internet and lash out the remaining 43.1 percent on the disapproving position. This reflects the increasing tendency of the internet “community” in becoming media agents who broadcast their music experience and store the memory on a virtual platform—often with the acceptance that online sharing has turned into a “norm” (Preston 2014). Sharing has surfaced as a trendy, socially appropriated behavior as a result of embracing modernity in the internet era. This cultural sense of technology-based modernity has quickly blurred the line between copyright protection of performance data and “the rights to share” when the internet is free and conveniently provided.¹¹

Conclusion

Music culture in new digitalization at the time when Web 2.0 dominates the mainstream and restructures aspects of cultural production and consumption (Beer 2008: 228). Perhaps, one of the anticipations in the development of internet mediated communication is the complex interconnectivity of real and virtual lives of modern people whose cultural spheres have influenced the current state of the internet evolution that could have probably affected the ways each sphere connects and operates.

The intended discussion of virtuality in this paper expands in two layers: how an “imagined community” experiences live musical productions as an

established ethnographic object, and how this object is authentically known through the method of virtual ethnography. With all the presented data and limited space for the analysis, it is hoped that a trajectory is created to illustrate the significance of exploration in the subject of new digitalization of music culture in line with cultural sociology. As virtuality is gradually deemed as an integral part of reality (Chow 2016: 68, 110), and possibly vice versa, what we need to do more in the scholarship of digital music culture is to extensively survey cultural spheres influenced by digitalized music and the shift of music culture with the development of the internet. Gazing into the future of virtual ethnographic studies involves taking on challenging subjects about new cultural derivatives from complex human interactions in the internet age.

Notes

- 1 Despite a resurgence of vinyl sales and relatively stable CD album sales, the shift in music consumption is generally towards virtual media, or at least toward a complex association of virtual and physical artifacts in common musical practices (Beer 2008: 223).
- 2 Benedict Anderson first coined this concept in the notion of nationalism, for which a nation regarded as “an imagined political community” and “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” becomes a “fraternity” that makes it possible for many millions of people to be willing to die, or not so many being legitimate to kill, for such “limited imaginings” (1991: 6–7). Acquisti and Gross (2006) applied this term to the community on a social networking site akin to a nation, especially the Facebook network (2006: 3, 18–19).
- 3 For instance, in research on information flows during the time of the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions, Gilad Lotan et al. (2011) classified 12 types of networked actors in the dissemination of news, including non-mainstream media actors such as bloggers, activists, digerati, political actors, celebrities, researchers, and bots (Lotan et al. 2011: 1382–3, 1385).
- 4 This musicological study examines the definition and significance of Buddhist music, apart from searching for music’s interconnectivity with Buddhism along parallel ideas of phenomenality and virtuality, investigating the emphasis of the Buddhist contexts deemed inseparable from music, and finally formulating an idea of Buddhist being in music (Chow 2016: 106–12).
- 5 Using a combination of qualitative analytical methods in virtual ethnography, as well as conventional ethnography, is to establish the heuristics to diminish defective results by complementing the constraints of each method with another.
- 6 Other types of live music performance can also be considered as subjects in any subsequent study.
- 7 Namely the role of travel and face-to-face interaction in ethnography; text, technology, and reflexivity; and the making of ethnographic objects (Hine 2000: 43–63).
- 8 SurveyMonkey [www.surveymonkey.com] provides online surveys that can be customized and further processed with data analysis, sample selection, bias elimination, and data representation tools. It also provides large-scaled options for enterprises intended in data analysis, brand management, and consumer-focused marketing. Besides, the website contains a free, limited service of data analysis which is able to tabulate charts and tables based on the data collected within a desirable period.

- 9 In the fields where multiple answers are acceptable, each selected answering option denotes a response entry. The percentage is calculated according to the size of the respondents and not to the total number of response entries, in order to reflect the tendency of each preference among all respondents.
- 10 As reflected in the entries for Question 2, there are a few respondents likely to mix up their experiences with that of a concert featuring only orchestral or choral music.
- 11 Other recent issues for further discussion are the elevated degree of privacy loss due to “the complex web of commercial interests” (Preston 2014), as well as internet surveillance by governments and corporations (MacKinnon 2012).

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