Small Arts Organizations:

Supporting their Creative Vitality

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Introduction

Small arts organizations (SAOs) play a significant role in the arts sector, which I have

highlighted in my article, "How 'Small' Are Small Arts Organizations?" However, despite the

purported importance and the high numbers of SAOs operating in the United States, SAOs have

not been seriously studied. As a result, they have often been overlooked (Chang, 2010). As

Rentschler and Radbourne (2009) pointed out, the size of arts organizations is a critical factor for

their "conformance and performance of governance" (p. 2); yet, in the general practice and

literatures of arts policy and administration, the size of arts organizations has seldom been seriously considered or studied.

As a brief summary of my doctoral dissertation, this paper examines how to support the creative vitality of small arts organizations. Highlighting the significant role of SAOs in the arts world, it explores the dynamic ecology of SAOs by focusing on the three key levers that move SAOs along the balancing point between their mission and their money in order for them to maintain their creative vitality: (1) Leadership/Entrepreneurship, (2) Technology, and (3) Support Systems. Based on these key levers, I have formulated the following research questions: (1) How does the entrepreneurship/leadership of individuals in SAOs affect the creative vitality of SAOs?, (2) How does IT, especially the social media, affect the creative vitality of SAOs?, and (3) What new approaches can be taken to support the creative vitality of SAOs?

To answer Research Question #1, I examined the issues and needs of SAOs within their ecology. I also looked into the relationships among SAOs, with larger arts organizations, and with the local community, including their audiences and support systems. Finally, I considered the impact of an individual's leadership and his/her entrepreneurial practices in managing an SAO and how they affect innovation at that organization. To answer Research Question #2, I examined the ways and reasons that SAOs adopt new technologies, including the social media and the relationship between IT use and the entrepreneurship and innovativeness of an SAO. To answer Research Question #3, I examined people's perceptions of the existing support systems for SAOs and identified the missing elements. I then suggested new approaches to supporting the creative vitality of SAOs.

Thus, this paper examines the dynamic ecology of SAOs with foci on

Leadership/Entrepreneurship and Technology. It also identifies the support systems for SAOs,

and suggests appropriate and affordable ways to support SAOs so that they can sustain

themselves in the challenging environment of the arts world.

Research Design

As DiMaggio (2006) has pointed out, current research has not paid enough attention to

"embedded and minimalist arts organizations" (that I take as SAOs) that involve a significant

amount of "interrelationships with other sectors" (p. 434). The lack of data regarding SAOs

indicates that quantitative research alone is insufficient to fully grasp the picture of SAOs.

Therefore, I take a qualitative approach, using the ecological perspective, and focus on delivering

the voice of SAOs.

In essence, the ecological perspective focuses on the influence of environmental factors at

multiple levels that shape individual or organizational behavior. This perspective helps us

appreciate the holistic treatment of the ecology of SAOs and the impact of the social media in

constructing the reality of experience. It also helps us not to miss the uniqueness of individual

cases. I believe that the complicated and rich phenomena of SAOs' life and experience can best

be captured by tracing the interactions and relationships among the agents within the ecology of

SAOs and that they are better represented in stories and narratives.

The research design for this study amalgamates a preliminary study and the two-tier qualitative research methods: For the preliminary study, I attempted to operationalize the definition of an SAO. For the first tier, I conducted the method of the Multiple Case Narrative on arts administrators at 13 selected SAOs in Columbus, Ohio. For the second tier, I conducted a year-long in-depth case study on a small theatre, Available Light, in Columbus.

In the preliminary study, I explored various definitions of SAOs in both non-profit and for-profit arts sectors and across various disciplines of the arts through extensive personal communications with professionals in the arts world. I conducted interviews via telephone calls, emails, and one-on-one meetings, from December 2008 to May 2009, and in some cases multiple times. This preliminary study has been published in the *Journal of Arts Management, Society, and the Arts* under the title of "How 'Small' Are Small Arts Organizations?" (2010). Through this study, I concluded that it is necessary to use multiple indicators of "smallness" to define small arts organizations. Then, given the aim of this dissertation to find ways to support SAOs, I narrowed down the indicators for defining an SAO to two indicators: fewer than five paid staff members (representing human resources) or an annual budget (representing financial resources) less than $100,000.

In the first tier study, the method of the Multiple Case Narrative is similar to the collective case study, which presents and compares several single case narratives. However, while the collective case study utilizes a variety of triangulation data – observations, interviews, and documents, the Multiple Case Narrative utilizes mainly interviews. The observations and documents are considered secondary data. This method is usually used when researchers are primarily interested in comparing cases and want a more systematic approach, but want to maintain a qualitative,

multi-aspect, in-depth study of the case (Shekedi, 2005). This method is especially useful in this paper to understand the dynamic relationship among SAOs and other agents in the creative sector, as well as audiences and support systems.

The first four SAOs were selected upon suggestions of authorities in the field, such as people involved in public arts agencies focusing on representing the diversity of SAOs. In addition, nine SAOs were selected using the snowball method, a nonprobability sampling technique by counting on referrals from the initial participants to generate additional participants. During the first-tier study, the multiple indicators of "smallness" were utilized to develop a multidimensional classification scheme of SAOs and arrive at four possible types of SAOs: Emerging, Self-Subsidizing, Cooperative, and Civic Type.

The second-tier study is an in-depth case study of Available Light Theatre (AVLT), an SAO in Columbus which was categorized as an Emerging Type. It was selected mainly because it showed most intensive dynamism, allowing me to observe more meaningful changing issues of SAOs within a limited time. Indeed, an Emerging Type like AVLT heavily utilizes the social media not only in its day-to-day management, but also in creating its works of the arts. The in-depth case study is designed to further elaborate on understanding the internal dynamics of SAOs, using the social media. The main data collection approach adopted in this second-tier study was non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted not only with company members or board members, but also with various individuals in the support systems of an SAO, including guest artists, audiences, donors, volunteers, and individuals in public agencies and supporting companies. The research process of the two studies are shown in Figure 1.
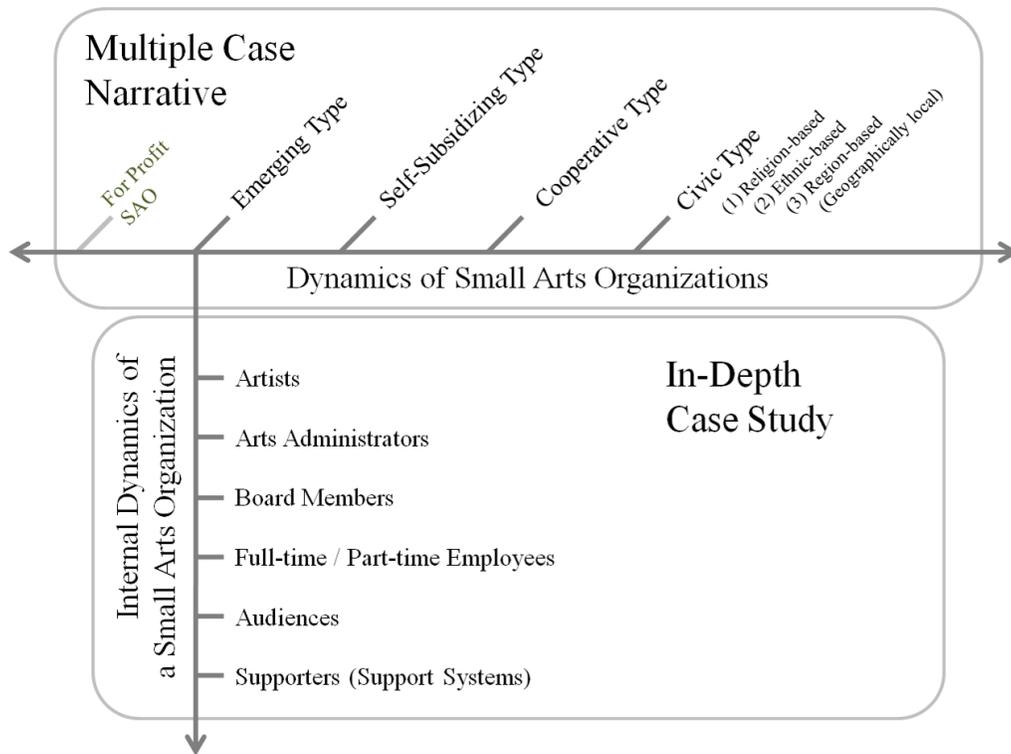
Figure 1 The research process

In both tier studies, an important method used is virtual ethnography. As an extended form of ethnography, in simple terms, virtual ethnography is the process of conducting and constructing an ethnography using the virtual, online environment as the site of the research, such as the company's website and social media sites (Hine, 2000). In this paper, I especially focus on various transactions that occur via the social media, how the social media change the relationships in the ecology of SAOs and enhance their dynamic and creative nature. Greschke

(2007) stated that virtual ethnography should not be limited to "screen research." The researcher must combine research on the Internet with physical observation of the participants to get a full sense of how the participants' activities via the Internet are a part of their real lives. Therefore, I have actively combined virtual ethnography with in-person interviews and observations of the participants.

Variety in Small Arts Organizations

In the case of the 13 SAOs that were included in the first tier study, I found that SAOs are quite diverse. Because of their flexible and innovative organizing ways, they are more varied than large arts organizations, and therefore cannot be fully captured by one label such as a "small arts organization" or a "grassroots organization." In fact, due the difficulty of defining them, SAOs are often regarded as "informal," though that can be rather misleading. As Maribel Alvarez (2005) has stated in her book, "There is Nothing Informal about it," given SAOs' participatory arts practices.

The organizational structures of SAOs are very flexible and innovative. Mostly, they are driven and led by one or two persons; therefore, for those SAOs, it makes little sense to separate the individual from the organization. For SAOs like the Dove Arts Project, Alfred Dove, the executive director, did not distinguish his personal income and the budget of the organization is not really distinguished. When asked about the annual budget of the SAO, Dove expressed some irritation saying, "That's like asking somebody how much they make in their paycheck" (Dove, personal communication, December 1, 2009).

Still, SAOs show a huge variety in engaging participants around the key person. In the Thiossane West African Dance Institute, the organization is formed by only two staff members who are at the same time artists, titled "musical director" and "creative director." The musical director, Abdou Kounta and the creative director, Suzan Kounta, are a couple who work together at the Institute. They get much of the support to sustain their organization from their friends. For Jared Mahone Band, Jared Mahone's wife, Karen Mahone serves as his manager, while his friends form the band.

Some SAOs like Westerville Symphony have a very formal structure just like any large business, even though most of the workforce consists of volunteers. Only the executive director of the symphony is fully paid with benefits such as health insurance, and the artistic director works part time. It is found that many SAOs prefer to have many part-time positions rather than one full-time position. For Example, the Columbus Landmark Foundation's staffing includes an executive director who is paid for 20 hours a week, an associate director who is paid for 25 hours per week and a field representative who is paid for 25 hours a week. Only two SAOs (Glass Axis and Westerville Symphony) among the 13 participant SAOs in this study have a full-time position as executive director.

There are many membership-based SAOs in which a large number of members are actually paying to be a member of the SAO such as Columbus Landmark Foundation and Glass Axis. Even though they have a small annual budget, the number of people involved in their activities is very large. For example, even though there is one administrative staff, the executive director, there are around 300 members and most members of Glass Axis are glass artists, who can rent and use the studio equipment. Glass Axis also offers courses in all phases of glass art, including

hot, warm, and cold glass traditions and techniques. So there are more than 800 people a year who take classes offered by Glass Axis. Many of those who attend those classes become members.

Some SAOs cross over the disciplines of the arts. Madlab Theatre and Gallery claims to have been dedicated to the creation, experimentation, and presentation of new and original works of all disciplines from music to theatre and from film to visual arts. In fact, its main discipline was theatre, but it opened a gallery in its reception place to accommodate some independent artists to show their artworks. The SAO also recently changed its name to Madlab Theatre and Gallery, which shows the flexibility of SAOs.

Due to SAOs' flexible and experimental nature, it is not easy to tell which emerging SAO belongs to which discipline. There is also an increasing number of new multidisciplinary SAOs. Furthermore, a considerable number of SAOs belong not only to the nonprofit sector, but also the for-profit sector. Eight of the 13 participant SAOs in my research were incorporated as 501(c)3, a non-profit entity, and two of them are preparing to be incorporated as non-profit. However, some SAOs such as Jared Mahone band and Couchfire Collective were deliberately incorporated as a for-profit entity for more artistic and entrepreneurial endeavors. As Adam Brouillette, the president and founding member of Couchfire, said,

> Couchfire purposely didn't sign as a 501.c3 . . . We filed as a for-profit company
> to manage our systems and make sure that the business is viable by creating an
> income for ourselves, but then the money that we make gets files back into us
> trying to achieve a mission like a non-profit would. What it . . . publicly states is

that we are not looking for grant money . . . , that we are a self-sustaining [and] functional organization that isn't reliant on grants. (Brouillette, personal communication, January 24, 2011)

As can be seen so far, SAOs span a wide spectrum due to the flexible and innovative ways in which they organize themselves. This flexibility of SAOs is certainly a unique characteristics and their strength. Thanks to their flexibility, in fact, despite the economic meltdown of the last two years, almost all organizations that I have interviewed saw an increased budget size than in previous years and are even expecting a bigger budget this year. In actuality, the constraint in their financial resources has been a longtime and constant issue for them. As Suzan Kounta in Thiossane West African Dance Institute sarcastically stated, "we were always in an economic crisis" (Personal communication, December 2, 2009).

As I explored the various standards for SAOs across a variety of sectors and disciplines in my article, "How 'Small' Are Small Arts Organizations?" I have found that multiple indicators, such as human resources and community impact, as well as financial resources (e.g., budget) are needed to acknowledge the variety of SAOs. In the article, I suggested eight possible indicators: (1) intention for future growth, (2) the form of collaboration in which SAOs engage, (3) the degree of community involvement, as well as (4) the number of paid staff, (5) volunteers operating key functions, (6) facility size, (7) annual budget, and (8) the size and scope of the collections and/or seasons. During my research on SAOs along the number of multiple indicators, I realized that SAOs can also be subdivided along the lines of their intention for future growth, forms of collaboration in which they engage, and their degree of community involvement.

For instance, SAOs can be categorized by their future aspiration to grow and be more professional (not just bigger) under the label of "Emerging Type." Next, considering SAOs along their form of collaboration, many SAOs may be called either "Self-Subsidizing" or "Cooperatives." The former includes SAOs whose members collaborate to subsidize a kind of work in which they are collectively interested, while the latter shares resources that are mainly used to support the work of individual member artists. Unlike the Emerging type, the Self-Subsidizing type is generally satisfied with its size. In actuality, the possibility of SAOs of this type to grow to be larger arts organizations may be limited due to their nature of being a volunteer-based organization. The Cooperative type of SAOs, in terms of their intention to grow, are more interested in developing and expanding the careers and work products of individual member artists by providing and sharing resources, facilities, and equipments, than in expanding their audiences (as Emerging SAOs aspire to do). Finally, if we were to examine SAOs by their degree of involvement in the local community, we could identify civic arts organizations that rely heavily on support from the local community in terms of both money and volunteer participation under the label of the "Civic Type." Since their target audiences are usually more focused in the local community, this type of SAOs usually includes the name of the community in the organization's name.

As aforementioned, I have conducted an in-depth case study on an Emerging type of SAO and cross-referenced it with the narratives from 13 SAOs in order to further examine the key levers that move SAOs along the balancing point between their mission and their money in order for them to maintain their creative vitality. These key levels include (1) Leadership/Entrepreneurship,

(2) Technology, and (3) Support Systems. This paper will explore the first two and will conclude with some suggestions on the last key lever, the support system of SAOs.

Entrepreneurship/Leadership in Small Arts Organizations

Within the ecology of SAOs, there are many forces that enable dynamic relationships among the multi-layered, multi-leveled agents. Among the forces, entrepreneurship has been discussed as a key word that keeps many individuals in SAOs, or the SAOs themselves, creative, yet sustainable within the dynamic ecology of SAOs. The concept has been a topic of academic research in the business field over the last several decades, although it is still considered an emerging (or unrigorous) field even in business, and has been defined in many ways. However, even with this uncertainty, entrepreneurship is emerging as an empowering concept in many other fields, including the arts world, where people keep searching for new ways of thinking, and it has been a preferred method to explain the significant role of personal engagement to move forward. In this section, the concept of entrepreneurship is reviewed as one of the significant forces for SAOs to relate to other agents in their ecology in order to identify how it functions in the intersection of the arts, arts culture, and SAOs.

The most widely known definition of "entrepreneurship" is a practice to start a new organization. However, the term has been extended to include social and political forms of entrepreneurial activity, so that it also refers to the practice of revitalizing existing organizations in response to identified new opportunities. However, either practice connotes risk-taking. The concept of entrepreneurship has also been more frequently discussed in arts administration mainly with

regard to managing risk in terms of resources. Hence, Kevin Mulcahy (2003) affirmed that "arts administrators have always had to be entrepreneurs" (p. 167). Giep Hagoort (2003), in his book, Art Management Entrepreneurial Style, also concluded that entrepreneurial configuration suits the cultural sector very well. Hagoort points out the connection between the strategy-making process and the entrepreneurship that suits the cultural/artistic sector. Evidently, scholars in the field of general management consider entrepreneurship as one of the main characteristics of artistic leadership (Mintzberg, 1989). Thus, in this paper, I use the term "entrepreneurship" almost interchangeably with "leadership."

Gus Geursen and Ruth Rentschler (2003) explained cultural entrepreneurship in relationship with cultural values. In their article, "Unraveling Cultural Value," they described two views of the concept of cultural values: the aesthetic view and the neoclassical economic view. The aesthetic view focuses on the quality of life and understanding of the social and psychological values of a culture. The neoclassical economic view focuses on measuring the economic impact of culture, such as in tourism (Geursen & Rentschler, 2003). According to Geursen and Rentschler (2003), cultural value is multidimensional and represented by different stakeholders such as audiences, sponsors, and government in ways that are convenient to their individual purposes. To balance the multidimensional cultural value, Geursen and Rentschler borrowed Schumpeter's (1961) definition of entrepreneurship as the ability to take existing resources and rearrange them in a more relevant manner. With this definition, they viewed cultural entrepreneurship as a process of creating value for the community that brings together unique combinations of public and private resources to enhance social and cultural opportunities in an environment of change, while remaining true to the creative mission of the organization.

Entrepreneurship in the arts is also defined with innovation and creativity, following Peter Drucker's (1985) definition. According to Drucker, entrepreneurship is a practice that has a knowledge base and that seeks to enable organizations to innovate while remaining true to their mission. Innovation which usually comes together with the concept of entrepreneurship has also been discussed in various contexts, such as technology, business, social systems, and policy making. Therefore, there is a wide range of approaches to conceptualizing innovation (Fagerberg et al., 2004). The classic definitions can be found in *The American Heritage Dictionary* ("the act of introducing something new" and "something newly introduced") and in *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* ("the introduction of something new" and "a new idea, method, or device").

In addition to these traditional definitions, Drucker (1985) defined innovation as a change that creates a new dimension of performance (Hesselbein, 2002). As can be seen, despite a variety of approaches, a consistent theme in these definitions can be identified: innovation is typically understood as the successful introduction of something new and useful. In this view, innovation is the specific tool of the entrepreneur, and creativity becomes the specific mission of the arts. Together, innovation and creativity exploit change as an opportunity to add cultural value. Therefore, entrepreneurship in this sense is necessary for arts administrators as they encounter technology-driven environmental changes. Indeed, many scholars claim that entrepreneurship in the arts, innovation and creativity taken together, is "the driving force behind the sustainability of arts organizations" (Rentschler, 2003, p. 164).

Criticality of an Individual's Entrepreneurship in Small Arts Organizations

In 2001, the Ohio Arts Council (OAC) conducted an extensive survey of arts organizations in the state of Ohio. In the process, it made a special effort to include SAOs. The OAC found that "information about small arts organizations is essential to the blueprint" of the arts world (OAC) and developed an extensive directory of more than four hundred SAOs by geographic region and specific art discipline. Among their key findings regarding the characteristics of SAOs were that "many SAOs are driven by one person, and if that person leaves the group, the organization often ceases to exist. Similarly, individuals working in these organizations are highly committed" (Ohio Arts Council, 2001).

The findings from my research also indicate that one individual's leadership is crucial for the performance of the SAO. Usually, most of the SAOs in my research were organized by a central individual and the individual's personal network. In some cases such as that of Sandra Rolland in Spirit Field Production, Alfred Dove in Dove Project and Jared Mahone in Jared Mahone band, the individual itself shapes the organization. Even when the SAO claims to be an ensemble or a collective of artists, SAOs usually operate around a key individual who usually shows exceptional leadership and entrepreneurship. For example, although AVLT claims to be "a fellowship of artists dedicated to building a more conscious and compassionate world by creating joyful and profound theatre" in its mission statement, Matt Slaybaugh, the artistic director, is the key individual who drives the company. Even though Jared Lindenau, the executive director of Cloudhaus, denies his significant role in the artist collective saying he is "not by any means . . . in charge of anyone [in the company,]" (personal communication, April 4, 2011), everyone in the collective pointed out that it was his leadership that enabled organizing Cloudhaus into the

organization it has become today. For members of Cloudhaus, the key leadership is that Lindenau seems to harmonize many different perspectives into action. As Jeffery Aldridge, a member of Cloudhaus, said, Lindenau can "effectively micromanage… not in the annoying like… I'm-over-your-shoulder-constantly way" (personal communication, April 4, 2011).

When the individual's leadership/entrepreneurship is well worked out and fully supported, the SAO becomes sustainable. In Available Light Theatre (AVLT), Matt Slaybaugh, the artistic director, was the key individual in forming the company and Artie Isaac, a board member, understood Matt's artistic vision; so he pledged his full support and catalyzed the company to dramatically grow. AVLT was first formed out of the former organization, Blue Forms Theatre, in early 2006, mostly with the personal connection of Slaybaugh. Slaybaugh later met Artie Isaac, who at the time was looking for a way to fulfill his artistic thirst after retiring from his own advertising agency. Isaac gathered together the board members and formed the Board of Trustees. AVLT was then incorporated in 2009 as 501(c)3. Fully understanding the significance of the leading individual's leadership, AVLT clearly states in its by-laws that "board members must support the artistic direction of Matt Slaybaugh. As a board, it is our strategic policy to help Matt realize his artistic vision." AVLT is currently the most active theatre in Columbus in terms of the number of original shows it presents. It is highly reputable, as indicated by the number of sold-out shows and number of favorable or controversial comments from the critics and audiences. At the end of 2010, when *Columbus Alive*, a local weekly news magazine, selected ten best plays in 2010 in Columbus, four of them were AVLT's shows.

Although his background is an artist in theatre, Slaybaugh recognizes the importance of the leadership and entrepreneurship to run an SAO. He is involved in and works for almost every

aspect of AVLT's business. He even designs and manages AVLT's website which is quite up-to-date and very interactive. It seems that he actually enjoys these administrative works.

However, relying only on one individual's super leadership does not sustain the organization. If the superman leaves, the SAO collapses. Or if the superman is not super, the SAO usually does not fare well. OAC also found that many SAOs "fear the organization will not succeed if [the key individuals. . .] leave it." (Ohio Arts Council, 2001). Artie Isaac, the AVLT board member points out, "We are asking in a small arts organization of way too much of one person. We're asking [them . . .] to be all these things-entrepreneur, leader, creative innovator – that's a lot to ask of anybody. It's almost like nobody could possibly do it" (Artie Isaac, personal communication, February 24, 2011).

The discussion above implies that the point of the support for the SAOs should be to support the leadership and entrepreneurship of the individuals in the SAO. One of the powerful tools to enhance the leadership and entrepreneurship of individuals in the SAO is technology. Among the various technologies that can support SAOs and the individuals in the SAOs, this paper especially focuses on the social media.

The Social Media and the Arts

There are multiple definitions of social media, almost all of which basically incorporate social interaction and co-creation via Web 2.0 technologies. The social media transforms and broadcasts media monologues into social media dialogues. They are the media for social

networking, using highly accessible and interactive publishing techniques based on the idea of Web 2.0.

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC)". Examples of social media include Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter. These outlets give their users the free choice to interact or collaborate with one another in a dialogue as creators of UGC in a virtual community, unlike in websites where users are restricted to the passive viewing of contents that are already created.

For arts organizations, the social media became the most powerful tool for attracting more audiences. It also became an indicator of how wide an audience an arts organization has. For example, major arts organizations such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Brooklyn Museum in New York or the Tate Gallery in London currently have from 50,000 to 500,000 "followers" in Twitter and fans who "like" their sites in Facebook, although the numbers do not tell the level of engagement of any one person.

Most importantly, the social media integrate technology into human behavior so seamlessly that people tend to equate the information gathered from the social media with that from personal communication or word of mouth. For example, recent research by the Society of London Theatres (SOLT) in partnership with the market research agency Ipsos MORI in Britain reported that "word of mouth recommendation, including personal blogs, Twitter and social media websites, is the source of information most likely to encourage people to attend the theatre, with

the figure almost doubling from 36% in 2003 to 65% in 2008," while "two in five theatregoers are . . . members of Facebook" (Iqbal, 2010). As can be seen, the social media unprecedentedly provided one of the best metrics of marketing and advertising in the arts world.

The literature, news, and web articles are replete with many successful narratives in the field of arts administration that report ways in which new technology has been adopted as an environment, a tool, and as the artwork itself. However, there are, as Bitar et al. (2007) found, arts administrators in SAOs who are more likely to make any decision regarding technology adoption based on hunches, which is highly risky for their future operations. In fact, there is a common perception in the non-profit cultural sector that SAOs can hardly afford additional adoption of new technologies.

Despite the recent economic downturn, SAOs have been given a lot of opportunities with the advent of the Internet, more broadly Information Technology (IT). The recent uses of IT, such as websites, blogging, podcasting, and most importantly the social media, have offered SAOs efficient, yet affordable tools for their day-to-day arts management. Especially because of its low entry level in terms of easiness of use and low (almost free) cost of adoption, the social media offered one of the best marketing tools especially for SAOs. In his book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, Rogers (2003) suggests five characteristics of technology that the adopting organization considers when adopting a new technology: (1) relative advantage, (2) compatibility, (3) complexity, (4) trialability, and (5) observability. The social media has high ratings on all five of these characteristics.

In addition, as many SAOs are young (usually within 10 years of their existence), many of them have "a thirst and appetite for technology" for them to be innovative and have the tendency to take the risk of adopting a new technology (Artie Isaac, personal communication, February 24, 2011). It can be said that they naturally possess innovativeness in the sense that, as Rogers (2003) puts it, it is "the degree to which an individual (or other unit of adoption) is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than other members of a system" (p. 267). That is to say, if one possesses more innovativeness, one can be interpreted as having an "innovative" attitude and would be more likely to adopt an innovation or a technology faster than other members of a system. Referring to the measure of innovativeness as "time of adoption," Rogers (2003) categorizes adopters on the basis of their innovativeness and calculates the percentage of each category in general practices of adopting innovation: Innovators (2.5%), Early Adopters (13.5%), Early Majority (34%), Late Majority (34%), and Laggards (16%).

By April 2011, 9 out of the 13 SAOs (about 69%, one SAO ceased to exist) who participated in my research were using at least one social media to reach out to the public. Since the participating SAOs in my research were not randomly selected, 69% is not an accurate representation of the number of SAOs using the social media. However, considering that 27% of small businesses use Facebook (Rockbridge Associates, 2011), we can surmise that many SAOs are Early Majority adopters that are actively using the social media. In fact, many artists and managers involved in SAOs confirmed in their interviews with me that the social media are "the game changer for SAOs" (John Dranschak, personal communication, September 21, 2010).

SAOs Empowered by the Social Media

Throughout the research, many interviewees were praising how the social media has opened the window of opportunity to reach out to larger audiences. In fact, because of the social media's vivid representations, an increasing number of arts organizations have marketing (or public relations) staff in charge of managing various social media outlets. For example, OSU Urban Arts Space in Columbus even has a position titled "Resident Facebook Poster," specifically designed for a person who communicates information of the Center to the public via Facebook.

Powerful Marketing Tool to Pinpoint the Niche

Available Light Theatre (AVLT) on which I conducted a year-long case study showed that SAOs can benefit from utilizing the social media. In fact, Nick Tomashot, a board member of AVLT in charge of finances, attributes the theatre's success to the use of the social media. As he said, "We have . . . technology and social networking savvy people, [which has . . .] been an important part of Available Light's success" (personal communication, July 15, 2010).

Comparing AVLT's present marketing strategies to his experiences at Red Herring, a small theatre in Columbus ten years ago, the current guest director of AVLT John Dranschak asserted that it is much easier to brand SAOs using the social media. He added,

> If I wanted to send something out to 2,000 people, it was with postcards. . . .
> We . . . sent out 2-3,000 postcards [per] show at a cost of $1,100 in postage. . . .
> And just with the way Facebook and Twitter have exploded in really the last two
> years, . . . that has helped [. . . SAOs] tremendously [to market themselves]. You

can get that message out and more importantly, it's allowing you to niche-market

in a way that was really hard to do before. (Dranschak, personal communication,

September 21, 2010)

Clearly, the social media has dramatically reduced SAOs' budget for marketing and even

allowed them to reach out to the public beyond their niche-market more easily. In fact, as Allen

Proctor, a nonprofit consultant in Columbus, remarked, SAOs generally allot a small portion of

their budget to market their works of the arts. This limited SAOs' ability to advertise. However,

the social media has "enforced them" (Proctor, personal communication, April 11, 2011) to reach

out to a wider audience with little cost and effort.

Enhanced Involvement of Audiences with SAOs

The social media has also drastically changed the ways for audiences to participate in SAOs'

events. As I spoke with people who came to the shows of AVLT, it was not difficult to find those

who had heard of the show through Facebook. In fact, many whom I interviewed had researched

shows on AVLT's website and on Facebook. Some of them had even gone through the personal

sites of each company member. A guest on the first night of the performance "Attempts on Her

Life" on May 13th, 2010 who did not want to disclose her name said,

I browsed Facebook pages to know more about people involved in Available

Light. . . . I felt more attached to AVLT. . . . For small arts organizations,

Facebook really works. [However,] I don't expect this kind of relationship [to

work] for larger [arts] organizations. (personal communication, May 13, 2010)

Interestingly, this guest seemed to have built an intimate relationship with AVLT by seeing the Web presence of AVLT including Facebook, even though she was not comfortable revealing her name.

In general, uses of the social media are strongly related to the users' age. There are many concerns about the digital divide ever since the Internet was introduced in the 1990s. However, some claim that the digital divide can be bridged by the social media. Beth Kanter (2010), a visiting scholar of Nonprofits and Social Media at David and Lucile Packard Foundation, pointed out that the social media can be used as a bridge between the top and the bottom of the pyramid of the digital gap. She believes that it can be especially valuable in connecting professionals working in the nonprofit field.

iStrategyLabs (2009), a social media marketing agency in Washington D.C., examined the demographics of Facebook users and found that more and more of Facebook's users are older. Between January 4th and July 4th, 2009, the overall number of users between ages 18 and 24 has grown by only 5%; between ages 25 and 34, the number has grown by 61%. In contrast, the number of users between ages 35 and 54 has grown by 190% and the number of users older than 55 years has grown by a tremendous 514%. Remarkably, most of the users on Facebook belong to the 35~54 age group. This does not mean that the number of young users has declined; however, the stats clearly show that more people above 55 years old are adopting the social media faster than one would have expected.

Case in point, after the last performance of AVLT's "Attempts on Her Life" on May 22nd, 2010, two grand moms came to the reception desk of AVLT to request a call for a cab and I had a

chance to talk to them. They told me that they had heard of the show through Facebook. It was interesting to me that while they found it difficult to look up the number for a cab, they had actively used Facebook, enough to learn about AVLT. This example indicates the extent to which the social media such as Facebook has lowered the threshold in terms of users' technological savvy.

As aforementioned, the social media has integrated technology into human behavior so seamlessly that people tend to confuse the information they gather from the social media with that from personal communication. In fact, many interviewees do not differentiate the message they receive via the social media from word of mouth. Melisa Weber, a board member of AVLT who is in charge of organizing fundraising events said, "How are we going to market this? . . . Because we have no budget, . . . it's all word of mouth or Facebook" (Weber, personal communication, July 15, 2010).

Enhanced Involvement of Artists or Volunteers with SAOs

The social media has also changed the way(s) artists get involved in SAOs. For example, many members of Cloudhaus, a small artist collective in Columbus, whose mission is to support the community with its works of art, have joined Cloudhaus by seeing its activities posted on Facebook. Cloudhaus is a loosely organized group composed of creative people in the local community who aim to involve the community through the arts, such as through drawing murals and installing artworks for fundraising toward various charities. For this type of an SAO, where the core of artists and volunteers is not clear, the role of the social media is more noticeable. Kacy Stith, a member of Cloudhaus who also works for a local educational publisher as a

marketing specialist said, "Mostly through social media like Facebook . . . is how we get people to know about us." During the weekly meeting of Cloudhaus on April 4th 2011, Lindsey Lawrence, the financial director of Cloudhaus, told me that during a meeting of just one and a half hours, her mobile phone kept ringing, as new followers joined Cloudhaus through Twitter.

Sean Lewis, an Iowa-based artist who has collaborated with AVLT several times, talked about how the social media eased individual artists' successful tours. He said,

> When I go to different cities, Twitter and Facebook have been huge. . . . At the end of the show, . . . I always say, . . . "If you liked it, please post on Twitter or Facebook." . . . Because I'm new in this city, I don't know anybody. So having these people just put up, "Just saw this amazing show, here's the link, you should go," [. . . I] can see the audience grow . . . each time I go to another city. . . . If this was ten years ago, I'd "have" to be in New York and I'd "have" to have a booking agent . . . . Half the time I go to venues and [when they ask . . .] "who's your booking agent?" They're . . . stunned when [I say . . .] "I just don't have one, I just work with me." (Lewis, personal communication, January 17, 2011)

One of the significant benefits of the social media that allows SAOs to extend their marketing impact is to provide a convenient way to add additional personal networks that are not known to any individuals in the existing network. For example, if AVLT sets an event in Facebook and invites the fans (who indicated they "like" AVLT), the invited fans not only accept or reject the event, but also add more invitations to their own personal network of so-called "Friends." Then the invited friends of the fans of AVLT who might have never known of AVLT otherwise may

get interested in AVLT's events and may be able to participate in them and even add more invitations to their own "Friends."

Likewise, Frank Lazar, vice president at Wells Fargo and a board member in AVLT, was first introduced to the SAO through Facebook. He said, "I saw [. . . AVLT] on the Facebook page [of a friend of mine] and it looked like something interesting, looked kind of gritty which I liked, it looked like something that was very thought-provoking and so I went to two or three shows, . . . and I was absolutely blown away by the quality" (Lazar, personal communication, February 11, 2010). Soon after, Lazar became a board member of AVLT. For many SAOs, one of the issues is to get board members who can help them in the management of SAOs. As can be seen in Lazar's case, SAOs can get board members who have professional skills that are really needed for their successful management.

Enhanced Communication within SAOs.

The social media has eased communications not only with audiences and artists outside the SAOs, but also with members within the SAOs. AVLT has its own organizational Facebook site along with the personal sites of all its members. They actually share bits of their "lives" – such as what they do and what they eat and where they went out – which increases the information they have about each other, if not in-depth. The increased information may reduce any unnecessary misunderstanding, which is critical for an organization's internal communications. Irene Alvarez, a board member who is in charge of marketing of AVLT, said, "That's a huge part of my day job. . . . I'm using it every day, all day. . . I don't know what we'd do without it, I would probably go crazy, especially with the amount of stuff that I have to post for marketing. It's just

nice to know that everybody [at AVLT] has it" (Alvarez, personal communication, November 1, 2010).

Because the number of people involved in SAOs is smaller, the internal communication is relatively easy compared to larger arts organizations. Moreover, I observed at AVLT that using the social media enhanced communications so much that it has even created a collective identity among its members. I also observed that by sharing this kind of collective identity, many other SAOs in my study did not have issues regarding who represents the organization to the public, which is an issue for larger arts organizations. So the small size of an SAO is a strength for using the social media more efficiently and in turn can be more beneficial for the SAO. Still, there are remaining questions about whether or not the social media really offer a participatory culture for small arts organizations and contribute to their audience development in the long run.

Explosion of the Social Media

With the increasing number of organizations using the social media, the SAOs' message may go unnoticed, which could hurt their marketing efforts. For example, some members of AVLT told me that two years ago when not many arts organizations were using Facebook, their messages including invitations to their events received immediate responses and they could tell the social media actually increased their audiences. This is why at the curtain call of every show, they make a point to ask, "Please tell your friends about us through Twitter and Facebook and keep the conversation going." However, recently they noted that more and more messages are not getting a response. This is not surprising. I myself have noticed that I pay less attention to

invitations these days, because I get too many invitations from too many "Friends," to be able to keep up.

The Medium is Not the Message.

Marshall McLuhan's (1964) famous aphorism, "the medium is the message," has received renewed interest in this Internet era. He basically views the media's role in society by its intrinsic characteristics, rather than by the content it delivers. When the social media was first introduced by the middle of the 2000s, the fact that AVLT was using Facebook or MySpace was telling that the company was very innovative. In this case, "the medium was the message." AVLT, which has actively used the social media since 2004, even while the company was known under a different name, Blue Forms Theatre, has been characterized as technologically innovative by its peer SAOs. In fact, AVLT was introduced to me at first by Jennifer Barlup, the board chair at Madlab Theatre and Gallery in Columbus, who said, "There is one company that . . . blows us out of the water. . . . AVLT is . . . really, really good about Twitter and Facebook and MySpace. They use those resources really well" (Barlup, personal communication, August 20, 2009).

However, Artie Isaac, a board member of AVLT who has been involved in many other arts organizations in Columbus, sees the change in the social media. Himself a social media guru, he has co-founded SpeakerSite.com, which is the world's largest social network of public speakers and event planners. He shared his concern saying,

> The media was the message when we would all say, "Hey, come over! We'll watch TV." The message became the message when we said, "Hey, come over and we're going to watch Seinfeld." . . . I'm afraid if people think they can get

their theater through the social [media]. . . . It isn't the technology that's the game changer, it's the message; and we either have a message that people believe is life-changing rather than sort of game-changing; and if we have that, people will come to us. It goes back to the message. It goes back to the arts and not [the technology] (Isaac, personal communication, April 1, 2011).

Members of Claudhaus who have relied heavily on the social media for their communications also confirm that the social media is useful if it is supported by actual "groundwork." Chris Hartley, an artist at Claudhaus, also said, "We're actually on the ground a lot, so people see us. . . . so it's social media plus reality." As I see it, the social media plays a role in society by its intrinsic characteristics even though it has expanded its realm beyond any other communications technology. Many people in SAOs still see the social media has changed their personal and professional lives. As Emily Rhodes, the development director of AVLT put it, "I still believe our strength is in using the social media to reach out to our audiences" (Rhodes, personal communication, April 13, 2011). It appears that the social media made the communication technology more personal than ever before. Therefore, perhaps, the media itself is not at issue anymore, but the networking it provides.

Social Networking vs. Social Media

Neil McKenzie (2010), visiting professor at the Center for Innovation, has noticed a change in how the social media is referred to and how it is used. He pointed out in his article, "Social networking vs. social media," that the social media was originally referred to as "networking" rather than "media." He explains, "the idea was to build a network of contacts much in the same

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way as you would do it in person" (McKenzie, 2010). However, these days, many organizations and individuals employ the social media as just another kind of media. McKenzie also points out that "a large percentage of arts organizations . . . only engage in social media and not social networking" (McKenzie, 2010). His observation is that for them, the "social media is just a way to pump out endless pitches and announcements and not to build relationships with their followers, customers and benefactors" (McKenzie, 2010).

In fact, many arts organizations which now utilize the social media are missing the interactive networking factor of the social media, which may be the most important characteristic of the social media to consider. If you miss out on the interactive communication via the social media, it becomes just another announcement board as what the organization had before. Therefore, maintaining vivid interactions should be the main goal of using the social media. In fact, the social media still needs time and effort to maintain those interactions. For that matter, the social media is not completely free.

Conclusion

Aiming to examine the dynamic ecology of SAOs with foci on Leadership/ Entrepreneurship and Technology, I conducted extensive personal communications with individuals in various SAOs in Columbus and cross-referenced them with an in-depth case study on a small theatre, Available Light. The findings of the study indicate that the size of arts organizations is a critical factor for the performance of arts organizations, as their issues and needs are different, depending on their size. From one perspective, smaller financial and human resources constrain SAOs' performance.

Conversely, SAOs' smaller constituencies encompassing board members and audiences can allow them to experiment with new, innovative, and sometimes controversial works. Their products are also deeply related to the local community because SAOs place significant value on their intimate relationship with their audiences that larger arts organizations usually lose sight of, in favor of financial growth.

The small size of SAOs is in fact a strength. Financially, most have managed the economic difficulties in the last two years quite well. Their managerial flexibility has allowed them to survive the harshest economic situation ever, when many large arts organizations did not fare as well.

In addition, the findings indicate that often, one individual's leadership and entrepreneurship becomes crucial for the performance of an SAO. Therefore, the point of supporting an SAO should be to support the leadership and entrepreneurship of the individuals in the SAO. However, as far as the support system goes, many people I interviewed have an issue with applying for grants from public arts agencies. They believe that the bureaucracy of public agencies can be too controlling, so that their support becomes more difficult to handle. The issue is that existing support systems are mainly designed for already established major arts organizations. For example, when applying for grants from public arts agencies, they believe that the bureaucracy of public agencies can be controlling, costing too much time and effort.

Many SAOs are also concerned about arts advocacy groups that stress the economic impact of the arts to the local community more than their intrinsic value. SAOs agree that they are eligible to receive public support because the arts is a useful driver for the local economic prosperity;

however, SAOs believe their public value comes more in the form of sharing with their audiences their passion and creativity, that is, the process, and not only the end product.

The specific suggestion for creating new cultural policy for SAOs should start with recognizing both the individual aspect and organizational aspect of SAOs. Evaluating and qualifying an SAO only as an organization as if it were a miniature of a major arts organization will lead to misjudging the SAO as less organized and as having a lack of responsibility for the community. On the other hand, approaching an SAO by only evaluating the individual in charge of it will not capture the dynamic relationships among the individual artists, which has a huge impact on our society. Therefore, in order to fully support the creative vitality of SAOs, it is necessary to combine both approaches into creating a new cultural policy and any other strategies or programs of supporting SAOs.

Finally, I found that the social media has indeed changed the way(s) that SAOs communicate with the public as a powerful marketing tool to help them identify their niche. I also learned that the social media has dramatically eased and, therefore, enhanced the involvement of audiences with SAOs. Furthermore, it has facilitated painless ways for individual supporters/advocates of the arts to engage in the activities of SAOs. Therefore, it can be said that the social media has been the game changer for many SAOs to be able to maintain their competitive edge.

However, as the social media seems to have diffused widely enough for "Laggards" to adopt it, its "Early Adopters" no longer enjoy the prestige of the media just by using it. In fact, many arts organizations are forced to use the social media without clear strategies congruent with their overall plans to execute their missions, which would only produce another kind of old media

without any interaction with their target audience, plus would require further costs. This turns our attention back to the message itself that is delivered by the social media and to the passion to engage the social media even more interactively to keep spreading the message. When asked what the social media means, Matt Slaybaugh, artistic director of AVLT answered, "the social media is the opportunity to connect" (personal communication, April 13, 2011). In other words, the social media is not just another communications technology of the day, but the opportunity that allows us to share our passion for the arts with our "Friends."

In conclusion, size consideration for arts organizations is of utmost importance for the creative vitality of SAOs. It can enable various arts advocates, including arts agencies, to develop more implementable and effective support programs and cultural policy especially designed for SAOs. Size consideration also can enable SAOs to develop more efficient and feasible management strategies without mimicking the large arts organizations that follow the conventional "industrial model" where they have to always expand their market to survive. Instead, SAOs need to use the so-called "artisanal model" in which they do not sacrifice unique artworks produced by skilled artists in favor of mass-produced artifacts; nor do they attempt to achieve financial growth for the sake of growth; most importantly, they rely on local communities, as well as on their reputation and word-of-mouth to reach their audiences.

Available Light Theater holds a fundraising event every year, which they call "Feed Your Soul," believing that the arts are feeding our souls. If you can say, food is for our body and the arts are for our soul, I can find much common ground between cultivating food and the arts. In the same sense, I don't want to feed my soul only with mass produced arts. This is why I think we really must support the creative vitality of Small Art Organizations.

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