
RESEARCH ON THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS TOWARDS THE CURRICULA IN THE FIELD OF ART MANAGEMENT, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Vesela Kazashka

AMDFA “Prof. Asen Diamandiev”, Bulgaria, vesela.kazashka@artacademyplodiv.com

Tsvetomira Kazashka

AMDFA “Prof. Asen Diamandiev”, Bulgaria, Bulgaria, tsvetomira.ivanova@artacademyplodiv.com

Emilia Konstantinova

AMDFA “Prof. Asen Diamandiev”, Bulgaria, emilia.konstantinova@artacademyplodiv.com

Abstract: The aim of the present study is to explore the attitudes of students and employers toward the existing academic curricula in the fields of arts management, public relations (PR), and arts marketing at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The study seeks to evaluate the applicability, effectiveness, and relevance of academic disciplines and to propose potential avenues for their update in the context of changing professional realities and the evolving needs of the cultural and creative industries.

The methodology includes an empirical analysis based on online surveys conducted with two main respondent groups: undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in the selected programs, and employers from the cultural sector. The research gathers insights on key topics such as curriculum flexibility, the balance between technical and communication skills, the digitalization of the learning process, and the expansion of interdisciplinary approaches in education.

The results show that both students and employers highly value subjects related to communication and management, such as "Public Relations, Media, and Advertising", as well as practice-oriented courses like "Arts Management and Business Models". Digitalization and the integration of new technologies into the learning process are viewed as essential for future success. Students also emphasize the need for more in-depth inclusion of courses related to finance and marketing in the cultural industry.

The findings indicate a need to update the curricula with a stronger emphasis on achieving a better balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and an increased focus on digital and interdisciplinary competencies. The recommendations include the periodic revision of course content, the introduction of new disciplines aligned with the needs of the cultural sector, and the development of new forms of collaboration between universities, industry, and employers.

Additional data gathered from the surveys show that students report high levels of satisfaction with their education but recommend strengthening the practical orientation of the programs. The study also highlights a growing focus among employers on the creative abilities of their employees, which suggests the potential for formulating a research hypothesis linked to the concept of Artistic Intelligence (AI). Artistic Intelligence can be defined as the collective capacity of artistic and practically oriented skills through which individuals create impact and added value that goes beyond the specific and individual outcomes of a particular professional task.

Keywords: Art management, PR, arts marketing, Training and practice, Digitalization, Artistic intelligence

1. INTRODUCTION

Of particular importance is the National Strategy for the Development of Higher Education (2021–2030), which highlights the integration of flexible, interdisciplinary, and market-oriented curricular content. The updating of academic programs is directed toward implementing practice-based modules, strengthening collaboration with employers, and introducing innovative teaching methods—including digital tools and open educational resources.

A review of the global academic literature on the subject identifies several key research directions: digital transformation and multidisciplinary approaches, development of transferable skills, technological creativity, employment policies, and institutional support for the sustainability of creative work.

- ✓ The integration of AIGC (AI-Generated Content) promotes digital literacy, hybrid learning, and interdisciplinary connections, preparing students for a future where art and technology converge (Deng, 2025).
- ✓ The inclusion of the arts in general education improves student motivation, creative thinking, and socio-emotional skills while offering practical guidance for teacher training (Escala et al., 2024).
- ✓ STEAM approaches (integrating the arts into STEM) enhance engagement and critical thinking but require structural educational reforms and additional support for educators (Milara & Cortés Orduña, 2024).

- ✓ Creativity fostered through the arts is a transferable concept across academic disciplines, supporting the development of interdisciplinary competencies (Gormley, 2025).
- ✓ Aesthetic literacy is essential for professional preparation and effective communication, but is often taught implicitly—there is a need for its structured integration into curricula (Barton & Le, 2023).
- ✓ Employers value visual literacy and creativity even in traditionally non-creative industries, emphasizing the importance of early art education (Moore, 2012).
- ✓ The Artist Employment Program (AEP) in New York improves the well-being and technical skills of artists, underscoring the need for long-term and structured employment models (Treskon & Prinvil, 2024).
- ✓ Digital and immersive tools such as VR/AR assist in automated categorization and interactive engagement with art collections (Matt, Hess, & Benlian, 2015; Radianti et al., 2020).
- ✓ There is a growing need for curriculum reform, increased teacher readiness, and the development of infrastructure for interdisciplinary and technology-driven education (Milara & Cortés Orduña, 2024; Deng, 2025).
- ✓ Insufficient institutional support hinders the integration of aesthetic and creative competencies into school curricula (Barton & Le, 2023).

Vasil Kolev presents the implementation of the project “Modernization of the Educational Process at the National Music Academy ‘Pancho Vladigerov’ and the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts ‘Prof. Asen Diamandiev’ – Plovdiv”, offering an analysis of the achieved results based on anonymous surveys with representatives of the target groups. The findings highlight the high professional level of faculty, their adaptability to student needs, and the quality of academic programs that effectively support the acquisition of both theoretical knowledge and practical skills essential for professional success (Kolev, 2024).

While today’s world prioritizes economic growth, postmodern society is expected to place greater value on environmental sustainability and cultural identity (Inglehart, 2000).

The university strategy of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts “Prof. Asen Diamandiev” includes internal mechanisms for the regular evaluation and updating of academic content, based on feedback from students, faculty, and external stakeholders.

In this normative and strategic context, the present study examines the specific attitudes of students and employers toward the effectiveness, relevance, and practical applicability of existing academic programs in arts management, public relations (PR), and marketing and communication in the arts. The analysis aims to contribute with recommendations for aligning academic content with the demands of the contemporary cultural and communication environment.

This article presents the findings of a study conducted between March and May 2025 among undergraduate students in the program “Marketing and Communications in the Arts”, graduate students in “Arts Management” and “PR for Art Organizations”, and employers in the cultural and creative industries. The empirical research was conducted online using Google Forms.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main aim of the study was to investigate the attitudes of students and employers towards the main academic disciplines studied in the Bachelor's and Master's programmes, oriented towards the professional realization of art managers, public relations specialists and art marketers. The study is based on the analysis of empirical data collected through a survey. The aim of the study was to assess the relevance of existing courses, gather feedback from respondents on their usefulness and identify potential areas for curriculum update and development through the introduction of new courses tailored to the needs of the labour market and the development of the cultural and creative industries.

The research was implemented through two questionnaires specifically designed for the different target groups - students in Bachelor's degrees, as well as representatives of employers. Each of the questionnaires was tailored to the experience, competencies and perspective of the respective group of respondents, aiming to capture their perspectives both from the position of learners and that of users of the personnel trained by the academic institution.

The student questionnaire was aimed at participants in the undergraduate Arts Marketing and Communications programme and aimed to explore their attitudes and interests regarding the content of the training. The survey is anonymous and includes six questions, five of which are in the form of statements rated on a five-point scale (from "not at all important" to "extremely important"). These statements relate to the following aspects: relevance of the subjects studied, need for new subjects, competences acquired, relevance to future career and satisfaction with the programme. The sixth question is open-ended and allows respondents to express an opinion or comment on topics that were not covered in the survey.

The survey was completed by 12 first to third year students. The specialty is new, with studies starting in the academic year 2022/2023. A total of 22 students are studying in the major at the time of the survey, giving a sample coverage of 67%.

The survey, aimed at employers, aims to gather information on their expectations and needs for qualified staff in the fields of marketing, communications and arts management. The main objective is to use the data to optimise the curricula and to create new opportunities for students' professional development.

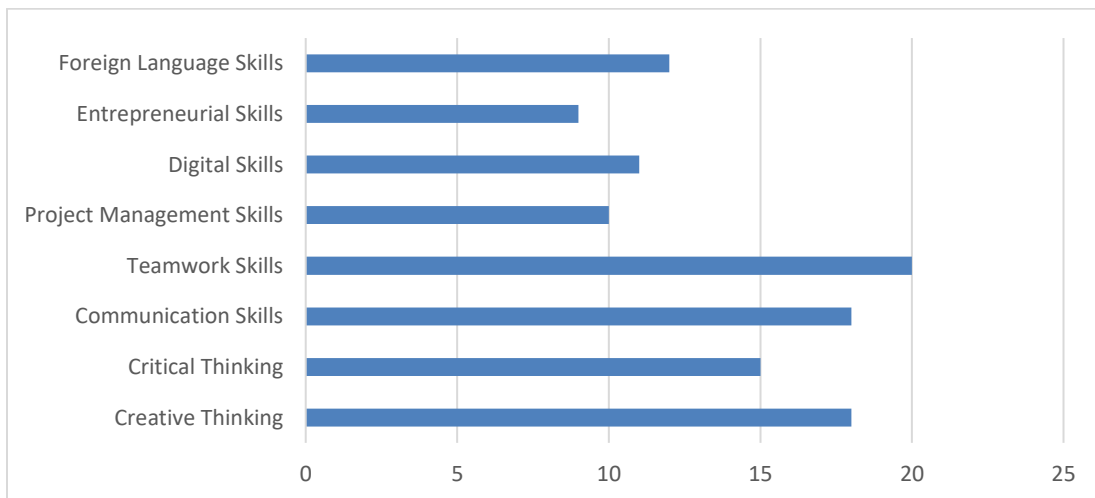
The questionnaire contains eight questions. The first three are related to the profile of the arts organisation - its name, its field of activity within the cultural sector and the number of employees. The next five questions are in the form of statements rated on a five-point scale, similar to the student survey. They aim to measure: employers' assessment of employees' competencies, the relevance of the disciplines studied, the qualities and skills sought, and suggestions for new disciplines and disciplines that employers believe have become obsolete in view of global and digital changes in the way we work and live in recent years. The survey was completed by 25 respondents representing managers and executives from public and private organisations active in the arts and culture sector. The questionnaire was completed by managers of marketing and consulting companies, theatres, festivals, galleries, music formations, associations.

3. RESULTS

It is characteristic of arts organisations that their staff is usually limited in number, with employment being temporary and directly related to the performance of specific creative tasks. According to the survey data, 56% of the employers are part of organisations with up to 10 staff, 32% belong to artorganisations with a staff of between 10 and 50 and 12% of the respondents work in organisations with more than 100 staff.

Figure 1 depicts the skills that employers in the sector rate as most important. It is noted that teamwork skills are the most highly valued, followed by communication skills and creative thinking. Foreign language skills, digital skills, entrepreneurial skills, project management and critical thinking are also valued, but with a lower weight than initially indicated.

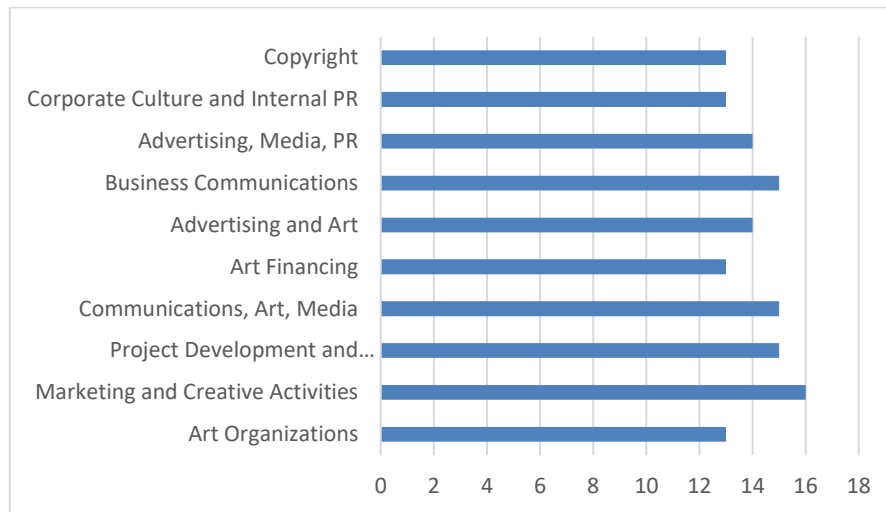
Figure 1. Skills most valued by employers



Source: Author's research

Employers' assessment of training, in terms of the qualifications of staff and their professional training, is key to curriculum formulation. Respondents emphasise the priority of subjects such as Marketing and Creative Activity and Communication, Art, Media. Details of these results are presented graphically in Figure 2.

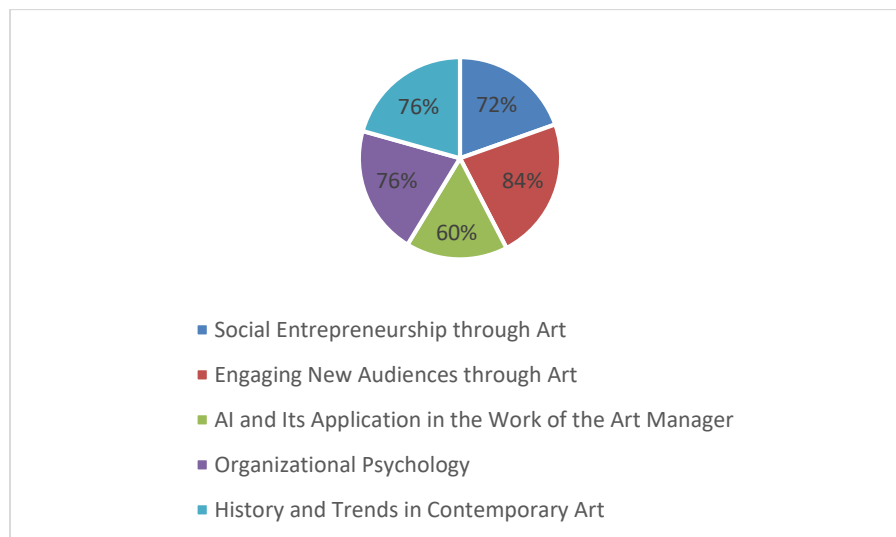
Figure 2. I find it useful to train in the following disciplines



Source: Author's research

At the same time, our interest was focused on exploring employers' attitudes and their need for staff who possess skills and competencies other than those currently emphasized in training. Their preferences for four new disciplines are presented in the graph in Figure 3. The highest preference is expressed for the discipline of "Engaging New Audiences through the Arts".

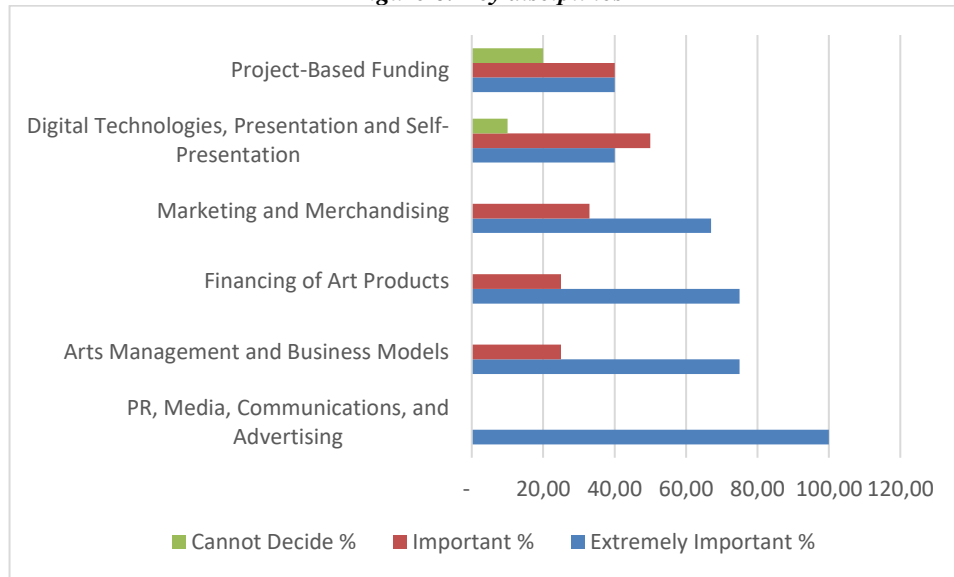
Figure 3. Preferred training in new disciplines



Source: Author's research

The results of the student survey show that students are generally satisfied with the training and the knowledge and skills they have acquired. To the statement "Studying in the Bachelor's program allows me to acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills" respondents answered 72.7% strongly agree and 27.3% "agree". Respondents rated the importance of key disciplines presented in Figure 1. These results indicate a high degree of positive evaluation regarding the content and effectiveness of the curricula.

Figure 6. Key disciplines



Source: Author's research

The survey results reveal a clear preference of students regarding the importance of different disciplines in the curriculum. Subjects related to public communication and strategic management are particularly highly valued. All respondents (100%) indicated the discipline of PR, Media, Communications and Advertising as extremely important. This strongly underlines the importance students place on communication and public relations skills as an integral part of their professional preparation.

The next most important disciplines were Art Management and Business Models and Financing Art Products, which were rated as extremely important and important by 75% and 25% of participants, respectively. This indicates that students perceive the managerial and financial aspects of the cultural and creative industries as key to their successful implementation in the sector. In a similar direction are the ratings for the Marketing and Merchandising discipline, which is also highly rated - 67% of respondents rated it as extremely important. This indicates a growing awareness of the need to know the market mechanisms and the possibility of strategic positioning of cultural products.

Disciplines such as "Digital technologies", "Presentation and self-presentation" and "Project funding" receive more mixed evaluations. A third of respondents considered each to be extremely important, while a higher proportion of students rated digital technologies as important but not critical (42%). Project funding was also rated as important by a further 33% of respondents. These results suggest that while the importance of digital, personal performance and project thinking are recognised, they are probably not presented in a sufficiently convincing or practice-oriented way in the learning process. This may be due to both the teaching methodology and the connection to real case studies from professional practice.

In conclusion, the courses with a clear management and communication orientation are perceived as fundamental to the training, while the others - related to digitalization, self-presentation and project thinking - have potential for further development and deeper integration into the curriculum.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The discussion, based on the results obtained, can be structured in five main directions: the need for flexibility and adaptability of the training process, the search for a balance between technical and communication skills, the emphasis on practically oriented management and business disciplines in training, the development of practical digital skills and technological competence, and the expansion of the interdisciplinary approach in training.

The results show that artorganisations, despite the diversity of their staff, have a pronounced tendency towards flexible recruitment of staff whose employment is linked to specific creative tasks. This necessitates a discussion on the need for curricula to be adaptable to meet the dynamic demands of artorganisations. It is possible to focus training not only on classical disciplines, but also on the development of skills for rapid adaptation and multidisciplinary that would allow young professionals to integrate into small but highly creative teams.

Surveys show that employers attach the highest importance to teamwork skills, communication skills and creative thinking, and that these skills have the highest priority over other competences such as foreign language skills, digital skills and entrepreneurial skills. For students, on the other hand, communication disciplines such as 'PR, media, communications and advertising' are rated as extremely important. This shows that there is a need for better synergy between technical and communication skills in the curricula. A possible avenue for discussion is how to balance training between these two skill sets and how to provide training that is both technically thorough and communicatively effective.

The survey results show that students place significant importance on courses such as Art Management and Business Models and Financing Art Products, which are perceived as important for their future careers in the cultural sector. This raises the issue of integrating more in-depth and practically oriented business and management courses into the curriculum. The discussion could include the issue of including more case studies, simulations and internships to prepare students for real business challenges in the creative industries.

Digitalisation in the cultural sector is not only a trend but also an undeniable necessity. Although students value the discipline of Digital Technologies as important, they do not perceive it as critical. This may signal the need for more intensive incorporation of digital technologies in the learning process. It is possible to discuss how these technologies can be integrated not only in specialized courses, but also in the context of other disciplines, such as marketing and art management. Students need to learn not only how to work with technology, but also how to use it strategically in order to be able to take advantage of the new opportunities of digitalisation in the creative industries. According to the data, employers and students highly value courses that combine elements of different fields, such as Engaging New Audiences through the Arts. This could be a topic for discussion about the need for interdisciplinary approaches to learning that combine the arts with business, social sciences, technology and others. In this way, students will be prepared to solve complex problems that require different competencies and approaches, both in the context of creative organizations and in a broader social and economic context.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the surveys provide a rich basis for discussing the need for dynamic curriculum renewal in the creative industries. The discussion should focus on the synergies between different types of skills, especially those related to communication, management, digitalisation and business competences, as well as on the future development of training in this dynamic and rapidly changing field.

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