TASMANIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT ASSOCIATION

A centralised event management system to enhance engagement among clubs and societies:

Recommendations for the Tasmanian University Student Association

TUSAxUC Student Lead Research Project

Executive summary

The value of campus life extends beyond academics. Student life should include co-curricular activities that provide an opportunity to socialise, develop their character and shape them for life as a graduate (King et al. 2020, Pittaway et al. 2011). As the student association of the University of Tasmania, the Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) is dedicated to fostering community engagement by supporting clubs and societies (C&S) (TUSA 2021). TUSA offers C&S various opportunities such as Clubs and Societies Day, resources such as Tip Sheets, and training that focuses on practical skills to assist over 130 clubs and societies to advance student experience (TUSA 2021).

Zuo (2021) highlighted that TUSA could further enhance engagement by providing students convenient access to an integrated calendar that displayed all the events organised by C&S. With the advancement of technology, digital media has made event management more efficient (Johnson et al. 2013), providing TUSA the opportunity to implement a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that enables the creation of an integrated calendar. Accordingly, this report focuses on consolidating the various forms that C&S need to fill and easing event management through the implementation of QPay as a centralised event management system.

Upon implementation through a pilot test, data about C&S executives' experience of using the consolidated form and QPay was collected through autoethnographies, and a thematic analysis was conducted. The thematic analysis arrived at three key themes – functionality, imperfection, and ignorance. Synthesising the themes with current literature, the report recommends TUSA implement QPay as the common platform among C&S, but to also collaborate with C&S and QPay to make possible improvements to the system's User Experience. Additionally, C&S executives should be educated and trained on the event management process and use of QPay. Finally, the report establishes that the implementation of the consolidated event application form was successful, suggesting that TUSA should implement it and grant C&S access to it through 'Union

Forms' on QPay.

While the report provides valuable insights into how the event management process at TUSA could be improved, using autoethnographies limited the study to a small sample. Therefore, once fully implemented, TUSA should focus on obtaining feedback from at least majority of the active C&S.

Introduction

As a student association, TUSA has a significant role in improving the student experience by enabling C&S to provide students opportunities for socialising, personal growth, and career development (Brereton & Mistry 2019). However, as identified by Zuo (2021), events organised by C&S have not been effectively promoted by TUSA, notably on their website. This lack of promotion and support is likely to negatively affect engagement among C&S (Stimpson & Farquharson 2015).

One issue is that students do not have convenient access to a source that provides detailed information about all events organised by C&S (Zuo 2021). Further, there is no proper procedure for clubs to apply for an event to show up under 'upcoming events' on the TUSA website, and a system through which they can receive event management support (TUSA 2021).

Accordingly, to tackle these issues, this paper aims to address the question: 'how can engagement of C&S be enhanced by supporting and promoting events organised by C&S?' To address this research question, the study focuses on improving the event management processes at TUSA by consolidating the various forms that C&S need to submit for event approval and implementing QPay UniHub (QPay) – a CRM system – to ease event management and display all events on one calendar.

The report first provides a brief literary overview of event management and QPay, with a focus on what it offers C&S at universities. Next, an overview of the implementation plan and autoethnographies conducted will be provided. The methodology is followed by the findings of the thematic analysis, along with a discussion of these findings. The study concludes with recommendations to TUSA and a highlight of the limitations.

Background

Since its beginning, researchers have paid increased attention to event management. It has been a major research theme across journals on event management research and hospitality and tourism management for over 15 years (Park & Park 2017). Event management is the process of planning an event (Wibisono, Primasari & Kurniawan 2020). Each event has a team that manages various aspects such as the activities and schedule, finances, promotion, and security (Damster 2005). The focus of event management is coordination between different divisions, such as TUSA and the club/society organising the event, to enable effective communication (Bhe et al. 2004).

Organising events is not an easy task. It requires significant time, energy, and money for promotion, tickets, ticket distribution, and participant validation (Wibisono, Primasari & Kurniawan 2020). Using digital media could make this process simple, more effective, and more efficient (Wibisono, Primasari & Kurniawan 2020). Interactive online apps, such as QPay, take advantage of the internet's widespread availability and advancements in web development to offer more personalised access (Ginige & Murugesan 2001) and more cost-effective options for event management and registration (Johnson et al. 2013).

QPay is a CRM that seamlessly integrates administration and end user management. It allows student unions/associations to customise their platforms with various modules, including 'society and club management', 'event calendar' and 'club affiliation' (QPay 2021). QPay's centralised event management module will likely assist in solving the challenges faced by C&S. Such a system will help establish a proper channel that will enable effective communication between TUSA and the C&S, facilitate successful organising of events and enhance student participation in events through effective promotion on clubs/societies' and TUSA's website (Wibisono, Primasari & Kurniawan 2020).

Method

Research design

A desktop analysis was undertaken through Google to compare event registration forms of TUSA to those of three other Australian universities/student associations, selected through purposive sampling – University of Melbourne (UniMelb), University of Western Australia (UWA), and Flinders University Student Association (FUSA). The comparison aided in identifying additional fields that could be included in TUSA's existing event application form. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison summary of event registration forms

University/Association	Field(s)
UniMelb	"Secondary contact details" "Event is held: On-campus/Off-campus Indoors/Outdoors/Part indoor, part outdoor"
UWA	"Consumption of Alcohol on Campus Guidelines"
FUSA	"Please select your requirements from FUSA for this activity"

Accounting for these potential improvements, and creating an opportunity for C&S to reach out for support from TUSA, the new form has additional features that allow C&S to:

- Request for event management support in terms of planning, funding, and promotion

- Upload the risk assessment and liquor permit, apply for a food permit, and book equipment for hire through one form

- Only fill in additional fields that are relevant, as they will expand if indicated as relevant

Upon approval, the form was made available under 'Union Forms' on QPay – https://unionportal.getqpay.com/form?fid=114.

Testing of centralised event management system

TUSA's existing event management processes were analysed to identify inefficiencies (Grover et al. 1995). To improve the current process and address existing inefficiencies, QPay was utilised as a CRM that enabled centralised event management.

Autoethnographies

To evaluate the implementation of the consolidated form and the event management process through QPay within a limited timeframe, critical reflections of C&S executives' experience were gathered through autoethnographies. The questions were emailed to 17 clubs/societies that were part of the broader QPay pilot study. Out of the 17, 4 executives responded with a brief and independent autoethnography addressing the following questions:

- What do you think about the event registration process on QPay? How does it affect/change your experience of organising events?

- If you could suggest any improvements that could be made to this event registration process, including the event application form, what would they be?

- Should the event application form be included under 'create new event' or is it convenient to access the form separately under 'Union Forms'? Why?

Thematic analysis

To analyse the data, a thematic analysis was conducted. This involved identifying interesting patterns within the data and analysing them (Braun & Clarke 2006). After becoming familiar with

the data, the data was coded by organising quotes into meaningful groups that represented a theme. After consolidating the themes, 3 key themes emerging from the responses were identified (refer Table 2).

Findings

Through the thematic analysis, three key themes were arrived at – functionality, imperfection, and ignorance. These themes were coded by identifying and reflecting on repeated patterns of meaning and interest. Table 2 provides a summary of the themes, along with their coding rules.

Table 2. *Common themes identified*

Theme	Coding Rule	Example Quote
Functionality	The quality of the system being fit for the purpose it was designed for.	"QPay does make process of ticket sales and refunds much simpler."
Imperfection	Imperfection denotes flaws in the event management system, signifying improvements that could be made.	"The QPay app would definitely need some work and improving the UI and ease of use."
Ignorance	Ignorance indicates inadequate awareness of the system and that the individual is uniformed of TUSA's event registration process.	"I also don't know where 'union forms' is?"

These findings will be explored in the following section.

Discussion and recommendations

TUSA should support C&S and empower them to enhance engagement (Brereton & Mistry 2019). The improvements made to the existing event application and management process affects all C&S and could change their event organising experience. Synthesising relevant literature with the thematic analysis, each theme is discussed. Further, other findings of the report are examined to provide recommendations for TUSA.

Functionality and Imperfection

Functionality refers to the system's ability to fulfil its purpose of streamlining the event management process that C&S need to follow. For the centralised event management system on QPay to be accepted, it should provide the necessary functions to complete executives' tasks – registering and managing events (Goodwin 1987; Wang & Senecal 2007). The executives' autoethnographies suggest that QPay improves their event management experience, while not making major changes to how events are planned:

> "The interconnectedness of membership type and events is an absolute dream come true. It saves so much time and chasing around because we no longer have to worry about it. That is the only main difference between QPay and other platforms such as Eventbrite."

> "QPAY event creation and registration hasn't changed our experience of planning events much."

This suggests that it is unlikely that there would be inertia causing C&S to resist changing to QPay and accepting it as the common platform for managing student-led events at UTAS. Additionally, given that student leaders of universities across the globe, including Australian National University, UniMelb, and University of Oxford, use QPay and are satisfied with their experience, it is likely to

be successful as the common platform for C&S at UTAS (QPay 2021).

> **Recommendation 1a.** QPay should be implemented as the common centralised event management system for all C&S at UTAS.

However, the next theme identified – imperfection – highlights that there are weaknesses in the system that limits convenience of use and efficiency. One executive's autoethnography illustrated strong concerns about the user interface and usability of QPay:

> "…. the QPay app has a tendency to redirect you to a website as opposed to staying on the app, which can be clunky and awkward."

> "The QPay app would definitely need some work and improving the UI and ease of use."

To be a fully useable, friendly system, QPay would have to be cooperative and conducive (Hoehle & Venkatesh 2015). For instance, instead of having to sort through various websites that executives are redirected to, it would be convenient to complete tasks through the app itself. To address such issues and smoothen the transition to QPay, it is important that TUSA provides C&S the opportunity to voice their concerns. Then, TUSA should address these concerns with QPay to ensure that C&S have a positive event management experience (Stimpson & Farquharson 2015).

> **Recommendation 1b.** TUSA should liaise with C&S and collaborate with QPay to improve the dynamics of the user-system interaction.

Ignorance

It must be noted that certain factors affecting usability are beyond the designer's – QPay's – control. Factors such as training and organisational culture have an influence too (Goodwin 1987). This claim of Goodwin (1987) is supported by the final theme – ignorance.

Ignorance indicates a lack of understanding of the event registration process and the QPay system. Majority of the executives' autoethnographies indicated a lack of awareness or confusion about the

event registration process:

> "It all seems like a bit of a mess, I never know whether to fill out the event application form on its own, or all the other forms as well."

> "Give us a link to this. I don't know where to find it."

Given that QPay is new to clubs and societies, it is important that TUSA provides C&S with necessary training on how to use QPay and take the maximum use of the functions offered by QPay (BCS 2021). Training prior to fully implementing QPay will provide C&S a chance to acclimate to any changes. Additionally, it will be a good way to manage resistance from executives (Khoury 2018).

Training executives on the use of QPay could either be vendor-provided or in-house training (Bose 2002). The initial training could be directly provided by QPay. This can be in the form of video training modules, documented guides, or even live sessions with a QPay trainer (Pingrey 2021). To address concerns and issues of a specific club/society that arise after the initial training, a TUSA representative that directly collaborates with QPay could be appointed. To address the lack of awareness about the event registration process, workshops that focus on educating executives on the basic registration process could be a simple but effective way to ensure that executives are aware of the process and the resources available on the TUSA website. Facilitating these education and training programmes online would be important with the COVID-19 pandemic (Urbancová et al. 2021).

> **Recommendation 2.** Educate C&S executives on the event management process through workshops and train them on managing events through QPay with the assistance of vendor provided resources.

Event Application Form

TUSA requires C&S to fill out various forms ranging from the basic event application to risk assessments and food permits. These are in the form of separate web-forms/downloadable documents that can be found on the TUSA website (TUSA 2021). Having to fill separate forms is time consuming and exhausting because it requires C&S executives to fill general contact and event details multiple times, switch between different web-forms and download multiple documents.

Although a lengthy form generally has a lower conversion rate (Kirkpatrick 2011), executives favoured the consolidated form as it provided them with an overview of all the forms that had to be filled, and the opportunity to conveniently complete the event application process through one form:

> "... we can just fill out the one and only form."

> "… it will be easier to group TUSA event applications … with other paperwork such as grant claim, forms and everything else to give committee members a birds eye view of the paperwork to be done."

Further, through the executives' autoethnographies, a strong preference towards having the form under 'Union Forms' on QPay, instead of at the beginning of the event creation process was clear:

> "Separate. Timing for creating the QPay event doesn't always align with timing of submitting event for TUSA approval."

> **Recommendation 3.** Provide C&S with the consolidated event application form, instead of multiple individual ones, and leave it under 'Union Forms' on QPay.

Conclusion

With the advancement of technology, digital media has paved the way for more convenient event management, especially with web applications and interactive forms. This report focused on using digital media to establish a proper channel that will enable effective communication between TUSA and C&S and facilitate successful organising of events to grow student engagement.

A pilot study was conducted to evaluate the feasibility of replacing the various forms that need to be filled for approval with one consolidated event application form and the feasibility of implementing QPay as a CRM that would facilitate centralised event management. Through autoethnographies, data about executives' experience during the pilot was collected and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify 3 key themes. These themes were then synthesised with relevant literature to arrive at recommendations for TUSA.

Accordingly, the report recommends that TUSA implements QPay as the common platform through which events will be managed because of its ability to streamline event management processes for C&S. However, there seems to be certain areas of QPay that could be improved. To address these issues, TUSA should liaise with QPay and the C&S and focus on making any improvements that would further streamline the event management process. Nevertheless, there is a limit to what a system can offer, and in certain scenarios, usability will depend on external factors such as the knowledge of the use. Given the presence of an indication that executives lack the knowledge and skills to manage and register events with TUSA, it is important that TUSA provides executives with adequate training on the event management process and QPay. Finally, TUSA should utilise the consolidated event application form for event registration/approval purposes. C&S should be provided access to it through 'Union Forms' so that executives could fill the form and publish the event separately.

Since the study was conducted within a limited timeframe, the functionality of the integrated events calendar on the TUSA website enabled through QPay could not be tested. Further, the study was limited to a small sample. To overcome these limitations, TUSA should evaluate the full implementation of QPay, and address the functionality of the integrated events calendar on the TUSA website with the involvement

of a greater number of C&S.

Acknowledgements

Conflict of interest

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