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Digital Consumption Journey of Art Buyers

How Artists Can Explore the Digital Consumption Journey to Succeed
in Commercializing their Art

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Master Thesis

presented as partial requirement for obtaining a Master's Degree in Data-Driven Marketing

NOVA Information Management School
Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

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by

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Master Thesis presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Data-Driven Marketing, with a specialization in Digital Marketing and Analytics

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism, any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

[Costa da Caparica, 13/01/2025]

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ABSTRACT

The digitalization of the art market has transformed how collectors discover, engage with, and purchase art. This thesis explores how artists' use of social media, websites, and email marketing shapes the consumption journey, highlighting a shift from gallery-centered models to direct artist-buyer relationships. Based on interviews and secondary sources, the study maps the digital consumption journey, assesses the role of each channel, and examines how content strategies impact engagement and purchasing. Findings show that authentic storytelling, emotional connection, and valuable content drive engagement, while follower count, hashtags, and captions have limited impact. Personal contact, such as direct messages or voice notes, further strengthens trust and frequently leads to sales. Social media, particularly dynamic short-form video formats like Instagram Reels, supports discovery, initial exposure and audience growth, whereas email marketing and website strengthens relationships and trust, allowing for long-term nurturing of potential buyers, while boosting purchase intent over time.

KEYWORDS

Consumption journey; social media; art commercialization; digital touchpoints; artist website; email marketing.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):



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1. INTRODUCTION

The digitalization of the art market has revolutionized the way art is discovered, consumed, and purchased, shifting the customer journey from traditional gallery visits to social media usage, democratizing access to art and also transforming how value is created and communicated in the art market (Nnenna, 2024). Social media has emerged as a pivotal tool for artists to connect with audiences, bypassing traditional gatekeepers and reshaping the consumption journey. Current literature underscores the profound impact of digital platforms on the art market. According to Kang et al. (2019), Instagram has become a leading platform in the art world, with nearly half of art buyers using it to discover and purchase artworks. Platforms like Instagram enable artists to build their brand, engage with audiences through personal stories and interactive content, and establish direct communication with potential buyers (Petrides & Vila de Brito, 2024). These interactions influence buyer behavior by creating a sense of authenticity and trust, which are critical in a market traditionally reliant on exclusivity and gatekeeping. Despite these advancements, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the specific actions artists can take on social media to optimize engagement and sales outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the digitalization of the art market, with online sales doubling from 2019 to 2023 and accounting for nearly a fifth of the global art market value (UBS, 2024). However, while the digitalization of art galleries and e-commerce platforms has been explored (Habelsberger & Bhansing, 2021), there remains a significant research gap in understanding the specific actions that make people want to buy art directly from the artist, particularly the ways digitalization has enabled artists to reach potential buyers without incurring the high commissions typically associated with galleries.

This thesis investigates how social media, websites and email marketing impact the consumption journey of buyers in the art market. It aims to address the nuanced ways in which artists can leverage these digital touchpoints to enhance the customer journey and foster deeper connections with potential buyers. By examining the role of these three digital touchpoints in this evolving landscape, this thesis seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the intersection between them and the art market. Specifically, it will explore how these tools can be utilized to not only engage audiences but also convert that engagement into meaningful outcomes, such as increased loyalty, advocacy, and ultimately, purchases.

The core concepts of this research include consumption journey, social media in art, and the impact of having a website and email marketing in art sales. Consumption journey encompasses the entire experience of an art buyer, from initial awareness to post-purchase interactions and ongoing engagement. Social media usage refers to artists' active presence on platforms like Instagram and Facebook to showcase their art, engage followers, and build their brand. Having a website is critical for building credibility, providing detailed information about artworks, and enabling direct purchases. Email marketing involves nurturing relationships

with potential buyers by providing updates, exclusive offers, and maintaining consistent communication. Art sales represent the culmination of these efforts, reflecting the effectiveness of an artist's digital strategy in converting engagement into tangible outcomes. These concepts collectively provide a framework to understand and optimize the digital strategies that artists use to enhance their impact in the art market.

This thesis seeks to address the following research question: How does the use of social media, websites and email marketing by artists impact the consumption journey of art buyers? With a specific focus on addressing the transformation of the previous gallery centered consumption journey into a digital and more direct consumption journey, while fostering closer artist-buyer relationships. Specific objectives include:

1. To map the consumption journey of art buyers influenced by digital touchpoints.
2. To evaluate the role of different digital touchpoints (social media platforms, website, and email marketing) in the consumption journey of art buyers.
3. To analyze the relationship between engagement and the frequency, format, messaging, and type of content consumed from specific artists.

To address these objectives, this study adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative interviews with artists and consumers will provide insights into their experiences with art on social media. This will be combined with the observation of the social media presence of artists.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CONSUMPTION JOURNEY

Consumer Journey is often understood as the series of steps or processes a customer undertakes to access or interact with a company's offering (Følstad & Kvale, 2018). It is a sequential process of how individuals learn about, purchase and interact with the company's brand, products, and services through specific touchpoints (Canfield & Basso, 2017). Unlike traditional methods such as service blueprinting, which prioritizes the company's perspective, customer journey analysis emphasizes the customer's point of view, offering a more holistic and user-centered framework (Bolton et al., 2014). This approach places customers at the center, making it a valuable tool for assessing and enhancing customer experience (Mangiaracina et al., 2009).

The customer journey is traditionally conceptualized as a sequence of interactions between firms and customers that spans prepurchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Nevertheless, Tueanrat et al. (2021) emphasizes the multidimensional nature of customer journeys, encompassing these three phases (prepurchase, purchase and post-purchase phase), highlighting the importance of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses at each stage. Schau & Akaka (2020), who advocate for a shift toward consumption journeys, which embed customer journeys within a broader sociocultural framework, believe that consumption journeys account for customer-driven touchpoints, such as product usage, community interactions, and long-term value creation. By framing consumption journeys as a practice-embedded activity, this approach recognizes the importance of communities and institutions in shaping experiences. Reflexivity and progressive engagement in these journeys allow consumers to align their actions with evolving goals and social norms, leading to diverse outcomes, such as identity transformation, social role shifts, and community-building. This expanded view highlights that value creation is not confined to transactions but involves ongoing processes influenced by personal aspirations, social interactions, and institutional frameworks. For marketers, this perspective necessitates a holistic understanding of how consumers navigate their consumption landscapes beyond immediate touchpoints.

In the art market, the transition from customer journeys to consumption journeys that Schau & Akaka talk about is particularly relevant due to the emotional and cultural significance of art. Traditional customer journeys may track a buyer's path from discovering an artist through a gallery to purchasing a piece. However, consumption journeys delve deeper into how buyers interact with art as part of their personal practices, social identities, and cultural contexts (Schau & Akaka, 2020). By adopting a consumption journey framework, artists and marketers can better understand how buyers' interactions with art extend beyond transactions to encompass identity formation, community membership, and cultural

engagement. This perspective enriches the understanding of customer behavior and highlights opportunities to create lasting value.

Tueanrat et al. (2021) identifies tourism, financial services, insurance, electronics, events and entertainment, and clothing and apparel as the industry's most frequently studied in customer journey research, with limited attention given to the art market. This lack of focus is notable, as the art market is undergoing significant transformations driven by the rise of digital platforms. Additionally, art purchases are often characterized by high emotional investment, making them distinct from other industries. Exploring and understanding the customer journey in this unique context is critical for developing targeted strategies that address both buyer expectations and artist objectives, ultimately fostering stronger connections and enhancing value creation in the digital art ecosystem.

The proposed stages of the art's digital consumption journey that will be explored in this study are the first three stages of the following four:

1. Awareness stage, where a potential buyer becomes aware of the existence of an artist and/or his art. He may encounter it through word-of-mouth, organic content in social media, an organic search in google or advertising.
2. Engagement (or consideration) stage, where potential buyers are actively engaging with the artist and the content they are sharing. They are considering whether they feel connected and represented by the artist and his art.
3. Purchase stage, where the potential buyer feels that they need to purchase a piece of art and go through with it.
4. Post-purchase or advocacy stage, is when the focus lies on a good customer service, building and nurturing relationships, and encouraging repeat purchases. This also includes encouraging customers to become advocates for the artist and his art.

2.1.1 TOUCHPOINTS AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

While the customer journey offers a broad view of buyer interactions, understanding specific digital touchpoints is essential for capturing the nuances of modern art consumption. Touchpoints are the building blocks of the customer journey (Clatworthy, 2011), representing the moments where customers interact with the brand, product, or service, which contribute to the creation of customer experience (Rawson et al., 2013). These interactions can occur through direct or indirect contact and may involve verbal or non-verbal communication, having an important role in forming unique experiences that contribute to overall customer satisfaction (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Homburg et al., 2017). Touchpoints span various channels, including online platforms, physical environments, and personal interactions, making them dynamic and multifaceted (Schau & Akaka, 2020). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) classify touchpoints into four categories: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external. Each touchpoint contributes uniquely to the overall customer experience,

emphasizing its integral role in shaping perceptions and driving engagement (Pantouvakis & Gerou, 2022).

In the context of the art market, touchpoints acquire additional significance due to the emotional and cultural dimensions of art consumption. Li et al. (2020) highlight that online customer journeys for hedonic purchases, such as art, are often more complex and involve more touchpoints compared to utilitarian purchases. This complexity is due to the emotional engagement and personal significance associated with hedonic products. They also concluded that for hedonic purchases, customers tend to engage more with rich, sensory, and experiential content. This finding suggests that artists should focus on creating immersive and emotionally engaging online content to effectively reach potential buyers.

The consumption journey of an art buyer typically involves multiple touchpoints that align with different stages of the journey, including discovery, engagement, purchase, and post-purchase interactions. Discovery touchpoints might include browsing an artist's social media profile, attending virtual or physical art exhibitions, or encountering digital ads. Engagement touchpoints often involve following an artist on Instagram, watching and engaging with content, or subscribing to newsletters that provide personalized updates about new collections or upcoming exhibitions (Habelsberger & Bhansing, 2021; Petrides & Vila de Brito, 2024). The purchase stage includes e-commerce-enabled websites, integrated social media features like shoppable posts, or direct communication with intent to purchase an artwork. Finally, post-purchase touchpoints encompass personalized thank-you emails, sharing user-generated content featuring the purchased artwork, or providing tailored recommendations for complementary pieces (Nnenna, 2024; Kang et al., 2019). The three main touchpoints that this thesis will address are social media, email and websites. These touchpoints not only facilitate transactions but also reinforce emotional connections between artists and buyers, cultivating loyalty and advocacy.

In today's digital age, artists have unprecedented opportunities to reach and engage with a global audience. While traditional galleries and exhibitions remain vital, digital platforms have become essential tools for artists to showcase their work, build relationships with collectors, and drive sales (Archetti, 2023). This study will focus on three main digital platforms, namely social media, artists websites and email marketing. Together, these digital platforms play a crucial role in shaping the consumption journey of art buyers. They provide artists with the tools to reach a broader audience, engage with potential buyers, and ultimately drive sales. Understanding the interplay between these platforms and their impact on the different stages of the consumption journey is essential for artists looking to navigate the evolving art market landscape.

2.1.2 TRUST AND CREDIBILITY IN THE CONSUMPTION JOURNEY

Social media platforms have become pivotal tools for the purchase phase of the consumption journey, offering features such as shoppable posts and integrated e-commerce

functionalities. These tools empower artists to monetize their art independently, bypassing traditional galleries that often charge high commissions (Kang et al., 2019). However, purchasing expensive artworks online presents unique challenges. Many buyers experience hesitation due to the lack of a tangible, in-person experience, which can raise trust issues about the authenticity and quality of the artwork. As highlighted by Becker and Jaakkola (2020), trust is a critical component of the customer journey, particularly in transactions involving high-value items like art. Without physical interactions or assurances of credibility, this barrier often makes it difficult for buyers to commit to significant financial investments.

Despite these challenges, the study by Petrides and Vila de Brito (2024) emphasizes that an artist's digital presence plays a critical role in addressing these barriers. By strategically managing their social media and online platforms, artists can not only showcase their work but also their identity, values, and creative processes, building a sense of authenticity and connection with their audience. Petrides and Fernandes (2020) emphasize the importance of social media in enabling artists to build personal brands, establish direct connections with their audiences, and promote their work on a global scale. The platforms facilitate not only visibility but also credibility, as followers' interactions, including likes, comments, and shares, contribute to an artist's reputation and perceived value. Additionally, tools such as customer reviews, personalized communications, and interactive content can replicate some aspects of the in-person experience, enhancing buyer confidence.

2.1.3 CONSUMPTION JOURNEY MAPPING

As potential customers engage with a brand, product, or service across multiple touchpoints, mapping the customer journey becomes essential to understanding how value is created (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). This process helps identify key moments, emotions, and pain points throughout the customer journey, offering a structured framework to analyze how interactions shape the overall customer experience (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Canfield & Basso, 2017; Halvorsrud et al., 2016). With the rise of social media and other digital platforms, the number of touchpoints has increased significantly, adding complexity to the customer journey and emphasizing the importance of mapping to enhance customer experience (Richardson, 2010). Research demonstrates that a well-designed customer journey can influence critical outcomes such as brand attitude, loyalty, and advocacy (Voorhees et al., 2017).

In the art market, where purchases are often deeply emotional and personal, mapping the customer journey through interviews with artists provides unique insights into how elements like storytelling, personalization, and authenticity resonate with buyers. Storytelling can create a deeper emotional connection, while personalization fosters a sense of relevance and care, and authenticity builds trust and credibility. Additionally, customer journey mapping bridges the gap between the artist's intended customer experience and the actual buyer journey, ensuring greater alignment and fostering stronger relationships (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020).

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA IN ART

The art market has undergone a profound transformation with the rise of social media, reshaping the customer journey in the art market, shifting it from a predominantly linear path characterized by discovery, engagement, and purchases primarily happening in galleries, to a dynamic, non-linear process enabled by digital touchpoints (Guo et al., 2024). This shift fosters direct and personalized interactions between artists and potential buyers. Social media serves as a dynamic platform for artists to promote art and gain exposure, engage audiences, share their creative processes, interact with followers, and build brands (Chhabra, 2022).

Platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook have emerged as virtual galleries, enabling artists to showcase their work directly to global audiences and bypass traditional intermediaries such as galleries and auction houses. This transformation aligns with broader trends in customer journey literature, where digital platforms are recognized as central to facilitating seamless, interactive, and multisensory experiences (Demmers et al., 2020). The emergence of social media has democratized the art market, allowing new and young artists to share their works that were otherwise excluded from traditional art channels like galleries and auctions (Nnenna, 2024). This accessibility extends to audiences globally, fostering a participatory culture where buyers and followers actively engage in co-creating value through interactions such as likes, comments, and shares. Such interactions are not only crucial for visibility but also contribute to an artist's reputation and perceived value (Kang et al., 2019).

A significant advantage of social media lies in its capacity to foster progressive and sustained engagement. Unlike traditional methods of interacting with art, which were often limited to physical encounters, social media facilitates continuous and evolving connections between artists and their audiences. By sharing creative processes, personal stories, and behind-the-scenes moments, artists can cultivate authenticity and trust among their followers. These interactions deepen emotional bonds, driving loyalty and advocacy, which are essential in building a dedicated audience base (Schau & Akaka, 2020).

Kang et al. (2019) identify Instagram as the preferred social media platform among artists, with 94% of surveyed artists favoring it. Additionally, Instagram has the highest engagement rates among all social media platforms, with 48% of art buyers using it as a discovery tool (Kang et al., 2019). Posts featuring the artist's face, their artwork, or content showcasing the creative process generally received higher engagement rates, such as likes and comments (Bakhshi et al., 2014). Content formats like tutorials, painting processes, humor, posts designed to arouse curiosity, and interactive question prompts were identified as the most effective in generating comments and fostering engagement. According to Kang et al., (2019), key elements that drive engagement on Instagram art accounts are: posts featuring practical information, such as tutorials or the artist's process, posts inviting audience participation, such as posing questions or showcasing the artist's personal life, and emotional appeals like curiosity, humor, and empathy, by further amplifying interaction. The literature also

demonstrates that consumer engagement with brand-generated content on social media is influenced by the stage of the customer journey (Demmers et al., 2020).

According to Polaine (2019), social media transforms the role of the artist into that of a facilitator of the art experience, making the artwork an interactive and co-created experience shared by users. Instagram enables "citizen curation," empowering everyday individuals to actively comment, interpret, and shape experiences by sharing their perspectives and opinions. These interactions significantly influence how art is perceived, discussed, and valued in contemporary culture. This participatory approach disrupts the traditional one-way, didactic relationship between museums and audiences, fostering dynamic collaborations where professionals and the public co-create meaningful and innovative cultural narratives. The ability to directly interact with artists also humanizes the artistic process and fosters deeper emotional connections, which are critical in building trust and loyalty among potential buyers (Demmers et al., 2020).

2.3 WEBSITES FOR ARTISTS

In the digital age, artist websites have become essential tools for building a professional presence, showcasing work, and driving direct sales. Unlike social media platforms, which operate on algorithmic visibility and rapid content consumption, websites provide a centralized and controlled platform for artists to cultivate their brand and foster deeper connections with their audience. While social media platforms like Instagram excel in creating awareness and driving initial engagement, websites complement these efforts by providing a structured and customizable space, enabling artists to present their portfolios, biographies, and artist statements in a way that reflects their unique brand (Cretiu, 2022; Pitt et al., 2017). Moreover, websites play a pivotal role in driving sales, as they help map the consumption journey by identifying critical touchpoints with the use of analytical tools. By combining visual elements, textual content, and interactive features, these websites act as both showcases and marketplaces for art. Cretiu (2022) highlights that by integrating online shops, lists of exhibitions, client testimonials, and prizes, it enhances the credibility and professionalism of artists, effectively positioning their websites as comprehensive digital resumes. Additionally, a well-designed website with intuitive navigation and compelling visuals significantly enhances the user experience, encouraging potential buyers to stay engaged and explore further.

The sentiment of the website is another crucial factor influencing its effectiveness. As Pitt et al. (2017) argue, aligning the emotional tone of a website with the artist's works can increase consumer interest and satisfaction, potentially leading to increased sales and positive word-of-mouth marketing. Sentiment analysis of artist websites reveals that positive emotions, such as joy or inspiration, significantly enhance user experience and encourage deeper engagement. Conversely, poorly designed websites can deter potential buyers, leading to missed opportunities.

One of the most impactful elements of artist websites is the inclusion of artist statements. These statements provide valuable context about the creative process, inspirations, and conceptual underpinnings of a piece, enriching its narrative and emotional resonance with the audience. As noted by Specht (2010), artist statements can significantly influence how viewers perceive and engage with artwork, making pieces appear more meaningful and increasing their appeal. While representational pieces showed the most significant change in perception, the findings also highlight that statements tailored to the art form, such as those invoking nostalgia or sentimentality, can deeply impact viewers' emotional engagement. This underscores the importance of strategic communication on artist websites, where statements serve not only as explanatory tools but also as critical components in building trust and fostering connections between artists and potential buyers.

In the context of art, websites must align with best practices to maximize their impact. High-quality visuals are essential for showcasing the intricacies of each piece, while contextual content, such as artist statements and behind-the-scenes insights, builds a compelling narrative around the works. User-friendly design, including clear navigation and responsive layouts, ensures that visitors can seamlessly interact with the site, regardless of the device they use. Furthermore, marketing tools, such as email subscription forms and integrated blogs, enable ongoing engagement with audiences and reinforce the artist's brand.

2.4 EMAIL MARKETING FOR ARTISTS

Email marketing is a cornerstone of modern digital marketing strategies, valued for its dual ability to offer promotional and relational benefits. By enabling direct communication with audiences, it provides an opportunity to build long-lasting relationships while also driving sales (Thomas et al., 2022). Effectiveness in email marketing can be enhanced by implementing motivational-based segmentation and leveraging utilitarian contingencies. Motivational-based segmentation involves categorizing audiences based on their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, such as personal interest in the artist's journey or desire to invest in unique, high-value art pieces. Utilitarian contingencies focus on creating messages that provide clear, practical value, such as exclusive access to discounts, early invitations to events, or detailed insights about the artwork's creation (Sigurdsson et al., 2016). Together, these strategies help to ensure messages resonate deeply with the intended audience, increasing both engagement and conversion rates.

Thomas et al., (2022) further demonstrates that different email types exhibit varying levels of effectiveness. For instance, promotional emails often generate higher spending amounts but may see lower engagement rates and higher cart abandonment rates, compared to CRM-focused emails, which excel in fostering customer loyalty and reducing cart abandonment rates. Personalization and segmentation stand out as foundational practices for improving engagement. Tailoring emails based on individual preferences, past interactions, or demographic data allows for more relevant and appealing content, significantly boosting open

and click-through rates (Hartemo, 2021). Additionally, leveraging information willingly provided by recipients enhances the sense of empowerment and relevance. However, there is a need to balance customization to avoid overwhelming audiences and causing higher unsubscribe rates. Another critical factor is crafting compelling subject lines, which act as the first impression of an email. Research demonstrates that personalization in subject lines, along with clarity and brevity, leads to higher open rates (Chaparro-Peláez et al., 2022). Furthermore, the timing and frequency of emails play an essential role in their success. Emails sent at optimal times, based on the recipient's likelihood to engage, and maintaining a consistent but non-intrusive frequency, have been shown to enhance engagement. The value of the email content itself cannot be overstated. Content relevance and value, whether through exclusive offers, insights, or relevant information, fosters trust and deepens audience engagement (Sempelidou et al., 2024). Empowering recipients to control the types of content they receive, further increases meaningful interactions and reduces the likelihood of spam complaints (Hartemo, 2016).

For artists, email marketing is a vital tool for maintaining visibility, building reputation, and creating direct connections with art consumers (Win, 2014). Email campaigns, when paired with storytelling, not only humanize the artist but also invite audiences into the creative process, cultivating deeper emotional engagement. Additionally, email marketing aligns with broader trends in the professionalization of artists as entrepreneurs, where artists are expected to market themselves, network, and directly promote their work (Win, 2014; Lehman & Wickham, 2014). Research into arts marketing suggests that the audience's engagement with art is multifaceted, ranging from emotional resonance to social identity formation. Personalized emails that highlight the artist's journey, upcoming exhibitions, links to virtual galleries, videos of artistic processes, invitations to exclusive events or exclusive limited-time offers can address these dimensions effectively.

Building on the insights about effective email marketing strategies, this information will be instrumental in crafting targeted questions for the interviews conducted in this study. By understanding the nuances of strategies such as content personalization, and the crafting of compelling subject lines, the interviews will explore whether these established practices align with the actual preferences of art buyers. Specifically, the questions will seek to uncover how art buyers perceive the relevance and value of personalized content, the role of email timing and frequency in their engagement, and the importance of storytelling in fostering emotional connections with artists. Additionally, the interviews will delve into the practical applicability of these strategies in the context of art marketing, examining whether techniques proven in broader digital marketing contexts translate effectively to the unique dynamics of the art market.

2.5 CUSTOMER RESPONSES TO TOUCHPOINTS

Touchpoints evoke a range of customer responses that shape their overall journey. These responses can be categorized into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Cognitive responses involve the customer's evaluation of the brand or product. This aligns with the understanding that cognitive reactions are shaped by customer perceptions of quality, value, and alignment with their needs, as highlighted by Tueanrat et al. (2021). This includes assessing quality, value, and alignment with personal preferences. In the art market, cognitive evaluations might center on the perceived uniqueness of a piece, the reputation of the artist, or the perceived difficulty of a specific piece. Artists can influence these evaluations through clear and transparent communication about their work's value, materials, sharing process videos, and important accomplishments.

Emotional responses are central to shaping customer journeys, particularly in markets like art, where purchases are often emotionally driven. Emotional responses, such as trust and joy, are critical in decision-making processes, as they directly influence customer satisfaction, decision-making and loyalty as highlighted by Tueanrat et al. (2021). Buyers are more likely to invest in artwork when they trust the artist's intentions and believe in the authenticity of their creations (Homburg et al., 2017). Social media platforms enhance these emotional connections by allowing artists to share their creative journeys, inspirations, and challenges, fostering a sense of intimacy and transparency. Storytelling has been identified as a powerful tool for evoking emotions and building relationships with buyers. Narratives that reveal the story behind a piece, such as its inspiration, meaning, or creation process, add depth and context, increasing its perceived value and appeal (Schau & Akaka, 2020). These emotional responses often drive loyalty and advocacy, as customers feel a deeper bond with the artist.

Behavioral responses reflect the actions customers take because of their cognitive and emotional experiences. These connections are well-documented in literature, where cognitive evaluations and emotional reactions are shown to significantly influence behaviors like purchasing, advocating, or disengaging. Positive interactions typically lead to desirable behaviors such as purchases, referrals, or repeat engagement. Negative experiences, on the other hand, may result in journey abandonment. For example, buyers who enjoy engaging content on an artist's Instagram account might make a spontaneous purchase because of a post with which they identified, or share the post with their network, amplifying the artist's reach. Conversely, a post where they feel they don't resonate with the artist's beliefs might lead to journey abandonment.

In an increasingly digital art market, these principles are vital for leveraging platforms like social media, websites, and email marketing. Each touchpoint represents an opportunity to connect with buyers on a deeper level, transforming one-time customers into lifelong supporters of the artist's work. By adopting a strategic approach to touchpoint interactions and understanding customer responses, artists can create meaningful and lasting value in their relationships with buyers.

Recognizing that touchpoints significantly influence customer responses, is essential to examine how their design and function vary across different markets. Personalizing customer journeys involves more than adjusting individual touchpoints, it requires adapting to the specific cultural, economic, and behavioral dynamics of the target context (Pantouvakis & Gerou, 2022). The customer journey in one industry, such as retail clothing, differs significantly from that in others, like the art market, due to variations in consumer motivations, decision-making processes, and value perception. Often, customer journeys are mapped without any real participation from customers themselves. This can lead to journeys that exclude critical touchpoints or overemphasize less relevant ones (Norton & Pine, 2013). In this thesis, one of the main goals is to identify and map the customer journey of an art buyer, identifying touchpoints and clarifying which stage of the journey holds the greatest importance to the customer.

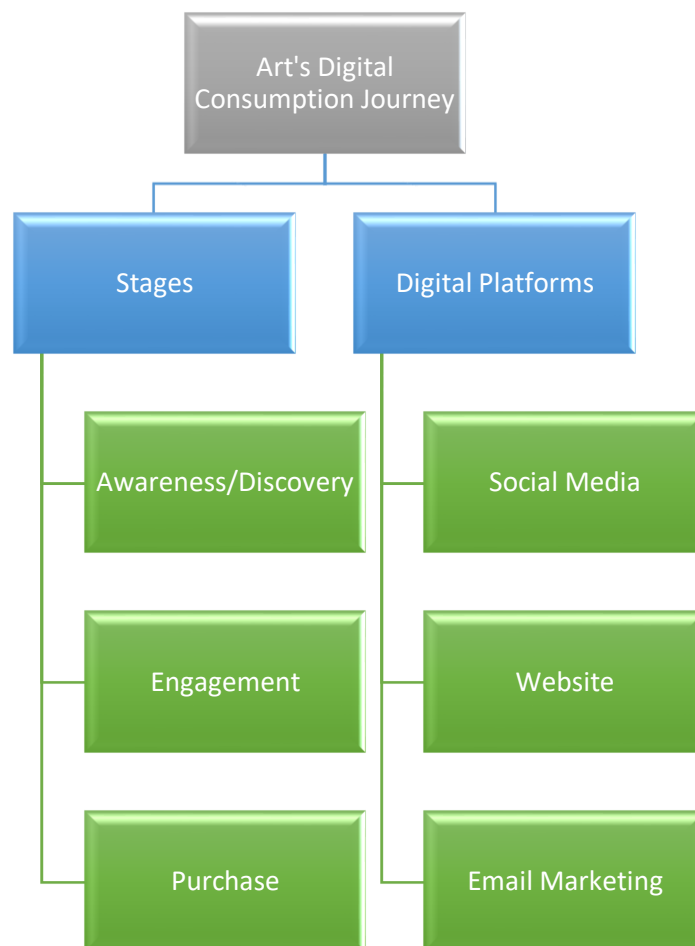


Figure 2.1 – Proposed thesis framework

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in interpretivism, which assumes that reality is subjective, socially constructed, and best understood through individual experiences (Greene, 1992). The goal is to investigate how social media, websites, and email marketing impact the consumption journey of buyers in the art market and, consequently, art sales. Data will be gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with artists, complemented by an analysis of the social media presence of artists and their practices using netnographic and text mining techniques. This approach is particularly fitting given the evolving nature of the art market, where digital platforms increasingly shape buyer behaviors and artist strategies.

The researcher's perspective plays a critical role in this study, shaped by direct and sustained engagement with the art market. In addition to being an active artist, the researcher is actively managing a professional online presence through social media, maintaining a personal website, and implementing email marketing strategies. This insider's understanding of the market offers a unique lens through which to examine the shifting consumption journey of art buyers, especially as the researcher has directly witnessed the transition from traditional gallery-dependent sales to more artist-led, digital sales.

3.1 DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews, and a platform named Apify, a powerful web scraping and automation tool that allows for the collection of large volumes of data from platforms like Instagram.

3.1.1 IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews are a powerful approach, more useful than other types of interviews for qualitative research because it allows researchers to acquire in-depth information about the experiences of the participants, while maintaining flexibility and adaptability, having the option to add or delete questions or simply adjust them to what seem relevant (Ruslin et al. 2022).

The themes and questions for the interviews (Appendix B) were prepared based on the research question and on exploring the digital strategies of the different participants, what they believe the best practices to be and how the switch to a more digital consumption journey has impacted their sales and strategy.

For the interviews, a snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit participants, beginning with artists known to the researcher before expanding the sample through referrals (Gierczyk et al., 2023). This is a good technique when dealing with hard-to-reach participants. The study benefits from reaching artists with a good social media presence, so that the gathered information through the interviews is more relevant and has more authority. The

final sample size was determined by data saturation, meaning interviews continued until no new and relevant information emerged from the data.

Each interview was conducted through Zoom, and all interviews were recorded for analysis. This enables interviews with participants who do not live in Portugal. Participants were informed of the recording process, and the consent was obtained before proceeding. They were also informed that the analysis process would be anonymous, and for that reason, no real names are used in this study. The interviews were conducted in English and Portuguese, and were translated for later analysis.

The table below represents the artists that participated in the study and their respective social media presence at the present moment (May 2025).

Table 3.1 – List of interview participants

Name	Followers	Website?	Email Marketing?
Luís	522K	Yes	Yes
Ana	25,5K	Yes	Yes
Nuno	13,7K	Yes	Yes
Marta	4106	Yes	No
Joana	6976	Yes	Yes
Filipa	1709	Yes	No

3.1.2 NETNOGRAPHIC STUDY

To complement the interviews and strengthen the findings, a netnographic study was conducted. Netnography is a qualitative research methodology that adapts traditional ethnographic techniques to study online communities and cultures (Kozinets 2015). Unlike traditional ethnography, which often involves immersive fieldwork, netnography allows researchers to study communities without physical presence, because of its focus on analyzing digital platforms and communities to gain insights into the lived experiences of online participants.

The netnography conducted in this study will involve analyzing the online presence of the 35 selected artists, most precisely their presence on Instagram. Through systematic observation, the researcher will examine correlations between engagement and the way artists answer comments in their posts and try to understand if there is a type of content that generates more engagement than others.

The data collection for this part was done with the help of the Apify app, starting by scraping posts from 01/01/2024 until 01/05/2025, and analyzing the ones with more engagement, striving to observe patterns and trends.

3.1.3 TEXT-MINING

Text mining is a pivotal technique in qualitative research, enabling the extraction of meaningful patterns and insights from large volumes of unstructured textual data (Singh, 2017). In the context of the art market, this methodology facilitates the analysis of digital interactions, such as social media profiles, posts, and comments.

In this study, text mining serves as a complementary approach to the semi-structured interviews and netnography, providing a quantitative dimension to the qualitative insights gathered. By analyzing high amounts of data, it was possible to uncover insights into how different practices impact engagement.

To operationalize the text mining component, Instagram was selected as the social media platform for data extraction. Due to its visual nature, the platform has become one of the primary digital spaces where artists showcase their creations, engage with their audience, promote their work, and establish their online presence.

In the context of this thesis, Instagram serves as a critical touchpoint in the art buyers digital consumption journey. Analyzing the content that artists share on the platform, including their captions, hashtags, and interactions with followers, enables a deeper understanding of how artists connect with their audience and how this influences the engagement.

A sample of 35 artists with a strong digital presence, each with over 50,000 followers was selected for analysis. The profiles of the 35 artists are public and all listed for consultation in Appendix C. Data scraping was conducted using the Apify platform, targeting relevant metrics such as follower count, engagement indicators (likes and comments), post and reel captions, video lengths, hashtags, and type of content (video, image or carousel).

3.2 DATA ANALYSIS

After collecting the data, an analysis was performed using three major techniques which will be examined throughout this chapter: qualitative analysis following Professor Saldaña's technique for in-depth semi-structured interviews, the researchers perspective and experience for the netnographic study and text-mining.

3.2.1 IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

For the analysis of the interviews, qualitative data analysis will be employed, following the guidelines of the author Johnny Saldaña. This method consists of a systematic coding process that allows researchers to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within qualitative data, making it an effective approach for exploring how the art buyer's digital

consumption journey has evolved, and the strategies artists use to commercialize their work online.

In-vivo coding is used as described by Saldaña (2021), a method that prioritizes the own language of participants by using their exact words as codes. This technique was chosen to preserve authenticity and to stay as close as possible to the experiences of each artist.

Steps for the Interview Analysis:

1. The interviews are transcribed.
2. The transcripts are carefully reviewed, and the most relevant information is highlighted, applying in-vivo coding.
3. The in-vivo codes are transferred into another document for analysis.
4. The codes are analyzed in alphabetical order and patterns and relationships are studied with the goal of sorting them into “feel alike” groups with a hierarchical order.
5. Categories are created for each group, and a second cycle of coding is made, to add or delete codes that lost or gained relevance.
 - Example: Codes related to social media, websites and email marketing could be grouped into a category named “Digital Touchpoints”
6. The relationships between the categories and within the categories themselves will be analyzed.
7. Themes are created, grouping existing categories.
8. Finally, an analytic memo is written, where the researcher tries to address how the categories relate to the phenomenon; what he finds intriguing, surprising or disturbing; emergent patterns, categories, themes, concepts, assertions, and propositions. (Saldaña, 2022)

Even though an example of a possible category name has been given based on my proposed framework, one of the goals of this technique is to build everything from the bottom up, letting the codes talk and interact, letting categories emerge, rather than imposing preconceived categories.

To visually understand what will be explored in this study, the following image from Saldaña illustrates the process of creating codes, categories and finally themes.

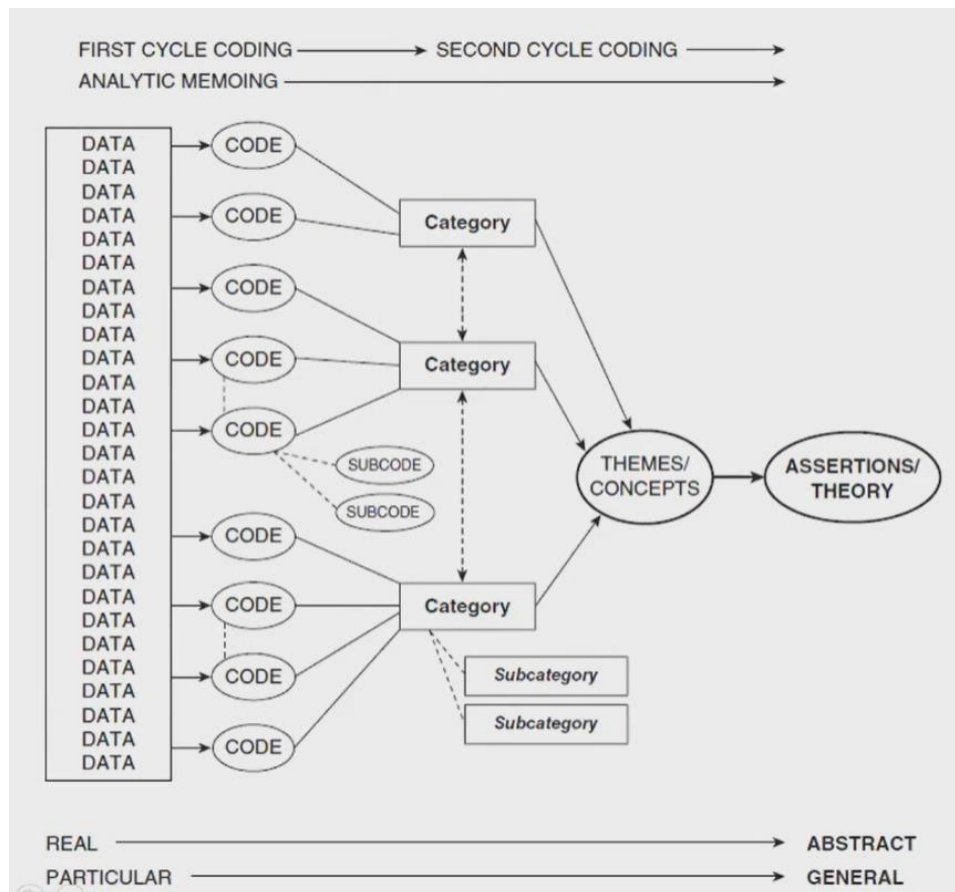


Figure 3.1 – Process of creating codes, categories and themes (Saldaña, 2022)

For the purpose of presenting the categories, codes and respective frequencies in the results part of this thesis, a table like the following will be used.

Table 3.2 – Structure used in the results chapter to organize the codes and respective categories

Category 1	Code 1
	Code 2
	Code 3
	Code 4
	Code 5

3.2.2 NETNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Data analysis of the netnographic study was done with observation, collecting print screens of behaviors, patterns and trends that seem relevant to the researcher. The print screens were then analyzed and connected to the research questions and goals.

3.2.3 TEXT MINING

The text mining process starts with cleaning and pre-processing the data extracted with Apify. Data that corresponds to invalid values are deleted, for example negative values for posts with hidden like count, and new columns are created which were needed to establish relations which will be later analyzed. For example, the number of hashtags in each post were counted and added to the dataset as a new column, “num_hashtags”, to analyze the potential correlation between the number of hashtags and engagement levels. After that a Python notebook was used for each analysis, using functions that already existed, and creating new ones, depending on the selected analysis.

Findings from the netnographic and text mining analysis will be combined with the results of the interview analysis, allowing for validation and comparison of data from interviews with observed online behaviors and strategies.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study adheres to ethical research principles, ensuring that all participants provide informed consent before participating. Interviewees will be assured of their right to withdraw at any time, and their responses will be anonymized to protect their identities. Given that some participants may share sensitive insights into their marketing strategies, confidentiality will be strictly maintained.

4. RESULTS

In this chapter, the findings from the various data analyses conducted throughout the research will be presented. The results will be introduced in a structured way, starting with the text mining analysis, which provides insights into the patterns and relationships found in the gathered digital content. The interviews were analyzed after the text mining analysis, as they provide a deeper understanding of how artists navigate their digital strategies. Finally, the netnographic analysis will be discussed, shedding light on what the researcher felt relevant to observe and explore after analyzing the results of the interviews. This approach allows the researcher to wrap up the analysis with a bigger view, drawing connections between the digital behaviors observed and the personal experiences shared by the participants of the interviews.

4.1 TEXT MINING

4.1.1 CAPTIONS ANALYSIS RESULTS

A thorough analysis was conducted, and the relationship between caption length, sentiment, most frequent words, and engagement (represented by the number of likes and comments on a post) was explored. The objective was to identify whether certain caption practices are more likely to generate higher engagement.

The posts were initially classified into two categories: those with likes and comments above the median of the dataset, and those below. Sentiment analysis was conducted using TextBlob, followed by several correlation analyses. The results indicated no strong correlation between caption length, sentiment, or the most frequent words and the number of likes or comments on a post.

A word cloud was generated to highlight the presence of frequent words like “painting” and “art” in posts with high and low likes and comments.



Figure 4.1 – Wordclouds of most frequent words in posts with high and low likes, and comments

These findings challenge the belief that there are some best practices that can drive more engagement when it comes to captions. Upon further reflection of the posts with more engagement in the dataset, it was also noted that they often feature a variety of different caption styles, including storytelling-styled captions that offer a narrative, more emotional and personal captions that foster connection, short and straight-to-the-point captions, and finally curiosity-sparking captions that start with a good hook. This shows how a diversity of captions can be used by artists and how each one can be successful in different contexts.

This shows that artists do not need to follow certain criteria for captions to drive engagement. Instead, they can focus on authenticity and other more important aspects of their daily practice, knowing that the success of their posts does not rely on the length, emotional sentiment or specific words of captions.

4.1.2 HASHTAG ANALYSIS RESULTS

The goal of this analysis was to determine whether the type of hashtags, and the number of hashtags used, has any impact on the engagement a post receives.

The correlation between the number of hashtags used in a post and the number of likes and number of comments the post received were calculated, and the analysis showed very weak and negative correlations. Between hashtags and likes the correlation was -0,0545, and

between hashtags and comments -0,0832, even suggesting an inverse relationship, meaning that more hashtags do not increase engagement.

In a second analysis, the most common hashtags used in posts with high engagement (likes/comments above the median) and low engagement (likes/comments below the median) were identified. This was done by flattening the lists of hashtags and counting the frequency of each hashtag across all posts in each group. The most common hashtags in all groups were similar, including terms like #art and #oilpainting. No patterns could be identified that would suggest that the use of certain words could increase engagement.

The findings from this analysis indicate that neither the number of hashtags nor the specific hashtags used have a strong correlation with the engagement a post receives. This suggests that artists do not need to focus excessively on the number or selection of hashtags to drive engagement.

4.1.3 FOLLOWERS ANALYSIS RESULTS

A correlation analysis was made to determine if there was a significant relationship between the number of followers and the engagement of posts.

The correlation between the number of followers and likes was 0,3981, suggesting a moderate positive correlation. It means that having more followers might help to get more likes, but other factors are likely to contribute to likes as well. The correlation between the number of followers and comments was slightly higher, namely 0.4126. Similar to likes, the number of followers seems to have a positive impact on the number of comments. However, this correlation is also moderate, meaning that while more followers can lead to more comments, the relationship is not very strong.

These results mean that while having more followers can increase engagement, it is not the main factor and represents an opportunity for accounts with smaller follower count.

4.1.4 VIDEO DURATION ANALYSIS RESULTS

The analysis of video duration and the relationship with likes and comments reveals interesting insights into how video length can impact engagement on Instagram. Video duration bins were first created (0–5s, 5–10s, 10–15s, etc.), and the data was sorted into the corresponding bins using Excel. The next step was to calculate the average like counts and average comment counts, in order to explore which were the bins with the highest engagement.

The table below summarizes the average like counts and average comment counts for each video duration bin.

Table 4.1 – Average likes and comments for each video duration bin

Video Duration Bins	Average Likes	Average Comments
0-5 seconds	24063,10	97,37
5-10 seconds	16419,16	131,88
10-15 seconds	5724,90	93,64
15-20 seconds	10278,09	136,29
20-25 seconds	9517,19	64,28
25-30 seconds	14159,07	140,31
30-35 seconds	8234,27	104,29
35-40 seconds	27454,79	216,23
40+ seconds	15870,99	153,32

The results that come from this analysis are very relevant. The short videos (0-5 seconds) generated the highest average number of likes (24063,10). However, they received slightly fewer comments (97,37) on average compared to longer videos. This suggests that shorter videos likely perform better in terms of likes because they capture attention quickly, but their ability to generate meaningful interaction through comments seems limited.

Mid-length videos (5-10 seconds) also performed well, but with fewer likes, with an average of 16419,16, and with slightly more comments, namely 131,88. These videos strike a balance between being brief, and offering enough time for some storytelling, fostering engagement, but still, perhaps not offering enough depth to spark more comments.

Another interesting result is about the longer videos (35-40 seconds and 40+ seconds), that showed the highest average number of comments (216,23 and 153,32, respectively). With more time to develop a narrative and to focus on storytelling, viewers are likely to feel connected and become more emotionally invested in the video. If they watch the video until the end, it suggests they are genuinely interested, and this interest increases the likelihood of them commenting on the post.

4.1.5 TYPE OF POSTS ANALYSIS RESULTS

With the goal of exploring how the type of posts could influence the engagement and the type of engagement of posts, another analysis was made, and the results are shown in the following table.

Table 4.2 – Average likes and comments for each post type

Post Type	Average Likes	Average Comments
Image	6757,58	75,83
Sidecar	9821,99	112,59
Video	14844,24	156

These results provide relevant information, video posts seem to be the type of social media content that generates the highest average amount of likes (14844,24), indicating their effectiveness in capturing the user’s attention and provoking a positive reaction. The same is true for the average number of comments (156), that suggests that video is a good option to generate engagement.

Image posts on the other side have the lowest number of likes and comments, indicating that images may be less effective in sparking curiosity, fostering a connection and leading to high engagement. Finally, sidecar/carousel posts have a higher average number of likes and comments, which means that this format is better than image posts in encouraging both immediate reactions (likes) and more thoughtful interactions (comments).

4.2 INTERVIEWS

In this section, the findings are structured around the categories that emerged from the coding process of the interviews. These categories: Website, Social Media, Email Marketing, Discovery/Awareness, Engagement, Purchase/Online Sales, Trust and Visuals, represent key elements in the digital consumption journey and are grounded in the codes identified through interviews. Each subchapter explores one of these categories, exploring the specific codes that represent the strategies, the beliefs and experiences of different artists.

An image follows this introduction, providing a visual representation of the bigger picture that emerged from the codes and categories, namely the 3 main themes: Digital Platforms, Stages of the Consumption Journey, and Drivers.

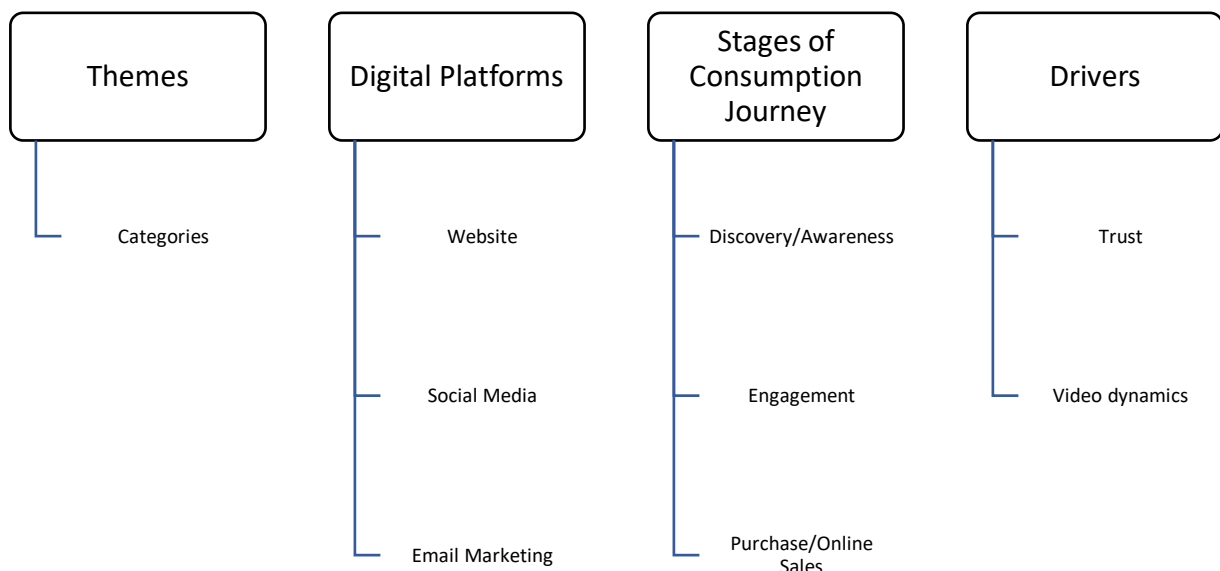


Figure 4.2 – The three emerged themes and respective categories

4.2.1 DIGITAL PLATFORMS

All the artists interviewed in this study emphasized the impact of digital platforms on their art marketing strategies. They are no longer 100% dependent on galleries and can reach audiences in the whole world directly through social media, websites, and email marketing. Digital platforms have been a gamechanger, providing artists with more control over their visibility and sales. It also opens new opportunities for building relationships with potential buyers and for collaborations across the world. The following subchapter will explore how these platforms are utilized by artists.

4.2.1.1 WEBSITE

As presented in the following list, the "Website" category includes the codes correspondent to the critical elements that should be presented on an artist's website.

Table 4.3 – 'Website' category with respective in vivo codes

Website	"An honest 'About' page"
	"Tells the story of my work clearly"
	"Story behind the artist and the work"
	"Testimonials"
	"Artist statement"
	"Blog"
	"Curriculum"
	"Email opt-in form"
	"Online store"
	"Clear product and collection pages"
	"Good quality portfolio"
	"Artistic reflections"
	"Complete control"
	"New exhibitions"

The most common themes in the codes for this category include clearly telling the story behind the artist and the art with an 'About' page and a clear artist statement, testimonials and finally a portfolio with good quality photos.

The existence of an online store and platforms like Shopify allows for direct sales, bypassing middlemen and offering a seamless transaction experience for buyers. Notably, two artists with large following on Instagram mentioned that the majority of their sales come through the website, emphasizing the importance of a well-maintained online store with clear

product and collection pages. This means that artists with a large following need a well-designed website that can handle higher traffic and facilitate seamless transactions, enhancing the overall customer experience. For those with smaller audiences, a website still serves as a crucial element of credibility and professionalism. Even if the volume of traffic is lower, having a dedicated space where potential buyers can learn more about the artist and their work can instill trust and encourage purchases. Nuno, one of the artists that was interviewed highlighted that: “My website serves as a reference point and institutional presentation.”

Another crucial aspect that aligns with the digital consumption journey are the forms to sign-up for the newsletter or other ways of capturing emails (email opt-in forms). Artists come up with different strategies to incentivize potential buyers to enter their email list. Potential buyers land on the website and are instantly confronted with an irrecusable offer in exchange for their emails. The irrecusable offer can be discounts, free gifts, the opportunity to enter a giveaway or others.

Finally, artists highlighted having complete control over their websites, in terms of the presentation of their work and the possibility to set their own prices. In galleries, the prices have to consider the commissions, but on their websites, artists can determine the value of their work and make adjustments as needed. This control extends to the overall website's user experience, allowing them to control the design and present their art exactly as they want, in contrast to social media, where the control is in the hands of the platform and the algorithm.

Based on the information gathered with the interviews and the observation of several artists' websites, the following table summarizes the key elements of an artist website.

Table 4.4 – Features of a successful website and respective descriptions

FEATURE	DESCRIPTION / PURPOSE
ABOUT PAGE & ARTIST STATEMENT	Clearly presents the artist's personal story, background, and the inspiration behind their work; Builds emotional connection.
TESTIMONIALS	Displays previous buyers' or collectors' experiences to reinforce credibility and trustworthiness.
PORTFOLIO WITH HIGH-QUALITY PHOTOS	Allows potential buyers to view the artworks in detail.
ONLINE STORE (E.G., SHOPIFY)	Enables direct sales, bypassing intermediaries; Allows artists full control over transactions, pricing, and inventory.
CLEAR PRODUCT & COLLECTION PAGES	Provides organized and user-friendly access to available works, making the purchase process smooth and transparent.

EMAIL OPT-IN FORMS	Captures email addresses from visitors for future marketing, building the artist's mailing list through incentives like discounts, giveaways, or free gifts.
BLOG & ARTISTIC REFLECTIONS	Shares deeper insights into the creative process, exhibitions, and personal reflections, further engaging visitors and encouraging return visits.

4.2.1.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Table 4.5 – ‘Social Media’ category with respective in vivo codes

Social Media	Contact	“Social media brought me a lot of clients”
		“Accessible to contact me and ask questions”
		“Brought me closer to the audience”
		“A more direct and quick interaction”
		“Contact with people is faster and more personalized”
		“Facilitated contact with galleries, especially abroad”
		“Broader exposure and more interaction”
		“Majority of my audience and buyers I interact through social media”
		“Can bring more people to exhibitions”
		“Don’t need middlemen”
	Digital Platform	“Youtube”
		“Pinterest”
		“Facebook”
		“Instagram”
		“Instagram to showcase my work”
		“Instagram is my main platform”

		"My business was built in the DMs"
		"Instagram Reels to showcase my creative process"
		"Instagram for daily storytelling and community"

Going through the codes collected for the Social Media category most artists believe that the biggest advantage of social media is the close and direct contact they get to have with their audience. They all believe that social media gives them broader exposure, allowing for interaction and engagement without the need for intermediaries, and it even facilitates contact with galleries and buyers across the globe.

The Social Media category highlights platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest. Instagram was cited four times more than Facebook, demonstrating its central role in the digital consumption journey of art buyers and artists' strategies. Platforms like Instagram facilitate personalized contact, which can convert followers into buyers. For example, an artist mentioned that Instagram stories serve as an effective tool for announcements and sales, allowing followers to feel more connected to the artist's journey.

Through Instagram, artists can showcase their work, build trust, and create a direct and personal connection with their audience. The direct messaging (DM) feature is a significant tool for interaction and even for direct sales, as one artist described their business as being built through the DMs: "Even my in-person workshops and corporate bookings come from online visibility, a post that resonated, a story that stuck, a DM that felt safe. My business was built in the DMs."

4.2.1.3 EMAIL MARKETING

Email lists remain a valuable, independent asset. Unlike social media, where full control is out of the artist's hands, email allows direct communication with an audience without any intermediary. This makes email lists an irreplaceable tool. When someone shares their email, they are giving permission to contact them, creating a direct, sustainable relationship. A responsive, engaged email list can significantly enhance the value of an art business, offering a reliable revenue stream that's always within reach, regardless of fluctuations in the digital landscape. Inês finds having a website critical for her: "Because if you're not having one and basing your business on a third party, you're practically renting space. And they can change the algorithm, change your pricing structure, decide what they are going to feature or not feature, and they are a variable between you and your customer, and you can't build the relationships either."

In the list of codes below, the artists that had built an email list and made efforts to consistently communicate with them enhanced that this offers a direct line of communication between artists and their audience and plays a crucial role in converting leads to buyers.

Table 4.6 – ‘Email Marketing’ category with respective in vivo codes

Email Marketing	“For a more direct communication with collectors and people who are interested”
	“Emails to nurture those who want a deeper connection”
	“Newsletter”
	“Sign up for updates and announcements”
	“Monthly print giveaways”
	“Share much more as I warm my list for an upcoming print drop”
	“Email converts the highest”

For artists with large followings, email campaigns can be used to announce new works, upcoming exhibitions, print drops, and special offers, reaching a broad audience efficiently. One interviewee pointed out that email marketing converts the highest for him. The ability to segment email lists allows for personalized messaging, increasing the likelihood of conversions.

For artists with smaller followings, email marketing can be equally, if not more effective. A smaller, engaged subscriber list allows for more personalized interactions and can foster a sense of community. Regular newsletters and updates can keep the audience informed and invested in the artist's journey, leading to increased loyalty and repetitive sales.

About the theme of growing an email list and encouraging subscribers to engage with the emails, several artists emphasized the importance of offering value to their audience in order to both attract new subscribers and retain existing ones. While some interviewed artists use the typical 'sign up for new announcements' strategy, the artist who generated the most revenue from his email list implemented a unique approach: a weekly print giveaway strategy. By offering a chance to win a piece of his artwork, the artist provided a tangible incentive that resonated with his audience. This approach not only attracted new subscribers but also kept existing ones engaged and excited about upcoming emails. The key lies in offering value that aligns with the interests and desires of potential buyers (Tommey, 2024).

Another relevant topic that was approached in the interviews was email automation. It has become a powerful tool for artists to make their communication more efficient with potential buyers while maintaining a personal connection. This method involves setting up automated email sequences, or "flows," that are triggered based on specific actions taken by

the subscriber, such as signing up for a mailing list, making a purchase, or abandoning a shopping cart. These automated sequences allow artists to nurture relationships with their audience over time without the need for manual intervention in every interaction. As Inês highlighted, “I have automated flows that introduce new sign-ups to who I am, what I do, and what to expect. And in that welcome series, they do receive several offers. I also have post-purchase automated flows, customer win-back flows, cart abandonment flows, they’re all automated.”

4.2.2 DRIVERS

Analyzing the interviews and the codes that emerged from them, it became clear that there was a lot of information being shared, about the importance of building trust and how storytelling impacts awareness, engagement and finally art sales. For that reason, this category was build, containing the drivers of engagement and good content.

Table 4.7 – ‘Drivers’ category with respective in vivo codes

Drivers	Trust	“Storytelling”
		“People collect based on connection”
		“Story creates meaning, trust, and value.”
		“Captivate with personal stories”
		“Deep sense of connection and transparency”
		“Personal”
		“Emotional connection”
		“Raw and very human”
		“Emotional and spiritual side”
	Video Dynamics	“Cinematic content around my work that invites people into my process, philosophy, and story”
		“Strong visual”
		“Brand identity”
		“Help them out”
		“Give tips”
		“Answer questions”

		"How to's"
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The 'Drivers' category emphasizes the role of emotional connection, transparency, trust and the visuals used in an artist's digital presence. Personal storytelling is vital in creating meaning and trust, with many artists using social media, their website and email marketing to share their creative process and artistic philosophy. This emotional connection is a significant motivator for art buyers, who are often drawn to the story behind the work as much as the visual of the piece itself.

In the digital environment, establishing trust is crucial to making a sale. Unlike in a traditional gallery setting where buyers can interact with the artwork physically and perhaps even engage with the artist face-to-face, online art sales depend heavily on virtual interactions. By answering their comments, DMs or emails, artists are offering a sense of visibility and authenticity, and these interactions make buyers feel seen and understood, which is an emotional motivator for purchase decisions.

Artists who create content that feels human and raw such as process videos, break through moments and artistic reflections, are inviting the buyers to feel more connected to the artist and the artwork. Digital content like videos and Instagram Stories are highly effective in creating emotional connections. Stories are a great tool for keeping the audience engaged and reminding them about available works or upcoming exhibitions.

While emotional connection and storytelling are crucial elements of social media engagement, the type of content shared also plays a significant role in building a strong relationship with the audience. Artists often find that providing content that goes beyond showcasing their work, content that is practical and valuable, helps to further engage their followers. As one artist shared, the posts that received the best engagement were those that "provide value to my audience, help them out, give them tips on how to do things they may be struggling with, resolve problems for them, answer questions." By addressing the needs and interests of their audience through educational or helpful content, artists can establish themselves as reliable sources of information and trust.

4.2.3 STAGES OF THE CONSUMPTION JOURNEY

Fine art sales rarely happen spontaneously. Collectors often follow artists for months or even years before deciding to make a purchase. During this time, they seek to connect with the artist, understand their vision, and feel confident in their investment.

Through the interviews conducted, a consistent theme emerged: purchases tend to occur after multiple touchpoints. Luís shared the example of a buyer who discovered him on YouTube, followed his journey for months, subscribed to his email list for a free wallpaper, and eventually purchased an original artwork. Reflecting on this being an exception, a discovery normally happening on Instagram for him, Luís summarized the typical consumption

journey as: “Instagram discovery → Follow the journey → Join email list → Receive launch email → Purchase.”

Another artist, Filipa, highlighted the often-silent process, saying, “People follow silently for months, feel seen by something I post, and then message me.” She emphasized that while the duration of the journey may vary, it is always a process that requires patience. Similarly, Nuno described how potential buyers typically begin by following his journey, sometimes reaching out via direct message with comments or questions, then subscribing to his email list in exchange for a discount or gift, before finally making a purchase.

Inês, being a huge advocate of ads described the start of the consumption journey of her buyers as follows: “Someone sees a post or ad, they have a read, they see the visuals or the video, they click through either to my social media account or 90% of the time to my website, within 10-12 seconds there is a pop-up collecting their email with an irresistible offer, and then they can either choose to spend that there and then and take the offer, or they continue to browse the website. My email opt-in converts between 5-14% depending on which opt-in form I’m using.” This process highlights a crucial aspect of the early stages in the consumption journey, where initial attention is captured through ads and enticing visuals, and then the website functions as the key touchpoint for deeper engagement. Her email opt-in mechanism helps collect valuable contacts, a valuable opportunity to engage potential buyers in the future.

She continues describing the journey: “If they buy instantly, great, if not they tend to join the email list and then I can just continue to put things in front of them and tell them what I’m working on and what I’m finding interesting at the minute, and how, what I offer can bring some kind of transformation to them.” This step emphasizes the stage where the relationship with the potential buyer evolves from passive browsing to active nurturing through email communication. By continuously offering valuable content and updates about her work, Inês effectively maintains contact with her audience, keeping her art in their minds. Over time, this consistent touchpoint builds trust, deepens the connection, and increases the likelihood of a future purchase.

For the purpose of this study, the codes derived from the interviews were categorized into three key stages of the consumption journey: Discovery/Awareness, Engagement, and Purchase. The goal was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of each stage.

While certain digital platforms may be more effective at different stages, social media, email marketing, and an artist’s website all represent critical touchpoints across all three stages of the buyer’s journey.

4.2.3.1 DISCOVERY/AWARENESS

The Discovery/Awareness stage is primarily influenced by Instagram. Many artists noted that Instagram is where their story begins and where potential buyers first encounter

their work. They view Reels as a powerful tool for reaching a wider, new audience and consider it their first choice for bringing their art in front of new people.

Table 4.8 – ‘Discovery/Awareness’ category with respective in vivo codes

Discovery/Awareness	“Find me through Instagram”
	“Instagram is where the story begins.”
	“Find me through social media or ads”
	“Google ads”
	“Paid advertising to lead people to website and Instagram”
	“Very underutilized is ads”
	“They watch quietly, read, feel.”

Additionally, paid advertising on platforms like Google and Instagram is used to direct people to their websites or social media profiles. This highlights the importance of targeted advertising in creating the initial connection between artists and potential buyers. Inês emphasized the significance of ads, saying, “Very underutilize is ads in terms of visibility. You can have ads running at a low cost that will massively increase your reach in social media, cause we all know how posts reach a tiny percentage of our followers.”

4.2.3.2 ENGAGEMENT

The Engagement stage is where artists build trust and emotional connection with their audience over time. Social media plays a significant role here, as buyers typically start by watching silently and interacting with content gradually, such as likes, comments, or replies. The process of building trust is crucial, as one artist mentioned: “It’s like your content kept whispering to me until I was ready.”

Table 4.9 – ‘Engagement’ category with respective in vivo codes

Engagement	“Build trust over time”
	“Communicate consistently”
	“It’s like your content kept whispering to me until I was ready”
	“Keep seeing my stories”
	“Reshared by other people with big accounts”
	“They start interacting with likes, comments and story replies.”

	"Sign-up to the newsletter"
	"Woman messaged me after months of watching my Stories"
	"Join email list"
	"Story replies, clicking links, asking questions"

Conversely, email marketing serves as an ideal platform for starting to engage with new potential buyers and cultivating long-term relationships with collectors. By sending consistent, thoughtfully crafted emails, artists invite collectors and potential buyers into their creative journey, sharing the inspiration, process, and stories behind their work. This ongoing narrative goes beyond mere transactions, fostering a deeper connection. When the story resonates with the audience, it creates a personal bond, making collectors and potential buyers feel emotionally invested in both the artist and their art. This process can take months, or even years, before a potential buyer ultimately makes a purchase.

4.2.3.3 PURCHASE/ONLINE SALES

In the Purchase/Online Sales stage, artists find that buyers are more likely to purchase smaller works, like prints or books, especially when they don't see the piece in person beforehand. One artist mentioned that for him, emails converted the highest.

Table 4.10 – 'Purchase/Online Sales' category with respective in vivo codes

Purchase/Online Sales	"They more easily buy prints, books, and small works"
	"After a voice note or comment reply"
	"Voice note"
	"Direct message"
	"Shared a photo of a past event"
	"3x payment"
	"They buy when they feel seen"
	"Post that resonated"
	"Appreciate in person before buying"
	"More affordable values"

	“Buy after several touchpoints - watching videos, reading emails, responding to stories”
	“Email converts the highest.”

To increase the chance of selling a piece, artists use voice notes, direct messages, sending additional photos or even offering other payment options. The use of voice notes seems to significantly influence purchasing decisions in a positive way. Four artists highlighted that sending a voice note explaining the story behind a piece led to a purchase within 10 minutes, illustrating how personalized communication can expedite the buying process.

A relevant finding was about the influence of a large vs. a smaller following on online sales. Luís (255K followers), Inês (50,8K) and Ana (25,5K followers) present very different approaches and outcomes based on the size of their digital following. Luís uses an almost entirely digital approach, using social media, his website and email marketing to drive the majority of his sales and collaborations. He mentioned that his “print drops can bring in 5k to 28k in sales”, and that “every launch is prepped through email”. He also adds that 90% of his sales come through his website, relying on a big and loyal email list to drive his sales.

Inês, with a lot less followers, has a mixed approach: “I don’t take time to make many exhibitions, I concentrate most of my sales predominantly on my website. I do sell original works, canvas, prints and paper prints on there, and then I do possibly two to three exhibitions a year. They are the cherry-on-top sales.” She believes that her email campaigns bring anywhere between 30% and 40% of her monthly sales, and that her social media presence brings people to her website.

Ana, on the other hand, has a smaller following, and relies heavily on galleries and exhibitions for sales. Here, the online presence serves more as a visibility tool rather than a direct sales driver. Her online sales are responsible for only 2% of total sales, with the rest coming from traditional channels. These 2% are small and more affordable pieces. She does not believe that buyers in Portugal would acquire a more expensive piece without seeing the artwork in person first. She uses social media and email marketing to announce new collections and exhibitions, driving potential buyers to her exhibitions, where the sales happen.

Artists with smaller followings, may find social media less of a tool for direct sales, but they should not miss the opportunity to build a strong brand, create content that speaks to their audience, to inform potential buyers about exhibitions or events, foster networking opportunities and utilize the visibility to forward potential buyers to their website, where they can collect their emails. Combining this with some physical presence on exhibitions could cover both ends.

In terms of email marketing, it seems to be a high-conversion tool for both types of artists. With different conversion rates, email marketing can always serve to nurture a bigger

or smaller email list, potentially leading to sales overtime. It is a great tool to consistently reach potential buyers and collectors consistently and tell them about the stories behind the artist and the art.

4.2.3.4 SUMMARY OF ART'S DIGITAL CONSUMPTION JOURNEY

Rather than positioning digital and physical consumption journeys as opposites, the findings of this thesis suggest the possibility of hybrid consumption journeys, where the balance between online and offline strategies depends on the artist's digital presence, consistency, and ability to foster online sales.

Understanding art's digital consumption journey is essential for digital-first strategies, but also for hybrid ones, as the art world continues to evolve.

Table 4.11 – The stages of the digital art consumption journey identified in this study

STAGE	MAIN PLATFORMS	CONTENT & ACTIONS IDENTIFIED	PURPOSE
DISCOVERY/ AWARENESS	Instagram (Reels, Stories, Ads), Google Ads	Short-form dynamic videos (transitions and angles) with strong hooks that capture viewers' attention. Quality, emotional or practical valuable content.	Reach wide audience and generate visibility.
ENGAGEMENT	Social Media, Email Marketing	Behind-the-scenes content, personal stories and creative inspiration. Email newsletters with inspirational and/or behind the scenes content. Giveaways.	Build trust, emotional connection, and nurture long-term relationships.
PURCHASE/ ONLINE SALES	Website, Email Marketing, Direct Messages	Email campaigns with product launches and exclusive offers. Voice notes and personal DMs explaining artwork stories, sending additional information and offering alternative payment options. User-friendly Website.	Convert interest into sales. Offer a seamless purchase.

4.3 NETNOGRAPHIC STUDY RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the netnographic analysis, which aimed to explore the types of posts that resonate with audiences and drive engagement on social media. During the study, several recurring patterns emerged regarding the performance of different types of posts, their content, and the strategies employed by artists to foster connection and engagement.

Based on the posts observed, four primary types emerged that tend to perform well: Emotional Connection and Personal Storytelling; Educational Content; Sales-Focused Content; Art-Centric Content. Interestingly, many high-performing posts combined two or more of these attributes. For example, a post may combine a sales-focused caption with a process

video, offering a glimpse into the creative process while also promoting the artist's work. Similarly, educational content can be integrated with art-centric content, such as a "How to" video demonstrating techniques used in the artist's process, adding both value and insight to the audience while indirectly promoting the artist's style.

Another key observation was the importance of hooks, namely, the first few seconds of a video or post that capture the viewer's attention and encourage them to keep watching. Videos with compelling hooks often spark curiosity, increasing the likelihood that viewers will watch the entire video, like and engage in the comments.

One strategy that emerged during the observation was the practice of reusing content that had already performed well. An example of this strategy can be seen in the following two images. In one instance, the artist shared a post offering valuable tips, which generated excellent engagement. Nine months later, the artist repurposed the same content, promoting a workshop instead. The call-to-action now directed followers to sign up for the upcoming workshop, yet the video itself remained the same. Remarkably, the post performed well again, demonstrating the lasting value of the content.



Figure 4.3 – Screenshot of Instagram content being reused for another post

4.3.1 EMOTIONAL CONNECTION AND PERSONAL STORYTELLING

These posts focus on the artist's personal life, experiences, and emotions, often without direct reference to artworks itself. They create a deep connection with the audience by allowing followers to share the artist's personal journey, values, and beliefs. This type of content helps humanize the artist, fostering a sense of relatability and engagement. The posts that seem to perform best in this category are those where the artist is vulnerable, sharing deeply personal aspects of their life. This authenticity makes the viewer feel valued, as if they are close friends with the artist, someone to whom the artist would share such intimate content.

The following images provide examples of high-performing posts that exemplify this type of content. These posts highlight the strategies used by artists to build emotional connections, share personal stories, and engage with their audience on a deeper level.



Figure 4.4 – Screenshot of a post from Devon Rodriguez

This post is a carousel, capturing the artist's vulnerability, sharing a childhood story that creates an emotional connection with the audience. The story humanizes the artist, making the viewers feel like they are being let in on something personal and meaningful. Such content is successful in building a community, where followers feel emotionally invested in the artist's journey.



Figure 4.5 – Screenshot of a post from Caroline Wendelin

In this post, the artist shares a heartwarming moment with their daughter, showing her talent and joy. By providing a personal narrative of her daughter's growth and creative journey, the artist invites followers into an intimate part of her life, fostering a sense of connection. The post conveys vulnerability, encouraging the audience to feel like they are part of the artist's personal life. This type of storytelling is effective in building trust and emotional bonds with followers. The video and the caption complete each other perfectly.



Figure 4.6 – Screenshot of a post from Júlia Barminova

This post is an excellent example of how personal storytelling can engage an audience. The artist shares a video about a significant and adventurous experience, namely, sailing to Antarctica, where she starts to feel inspired and comes across the idea of painting in miniatures. This not only humanizes the artist but also connects the audience to her creative process. This type of post sparks curiosity and inspires followers by showcasing the artist's journey and the creative ideas that emerged from it.

The key takeaway from these examples is the importance of authenticity and vulnerability in content creation. Posts that reflect personal stories or significant life experiences help humanize the artist, making them more relatable and memorable to their followers. As demonstrated, this approach is not only effective in engaging an audience but also essential in creating a loyal, supportive community.

4.3.2 EDUCATIONAL CONTENT ("HOW TO" OR "TIPS")

These posts provide value in the form of tips, tutorials, or problem-solving content and are highly effective in engaging followers. These posts often aim to solve a specific problem or

answer a common question that the audience may have. By offering practical advice, these posts not only engage viewers but also position the artist as an authority in their field. The following images showcase effective educational posts that provide value to the audience by offering practical tips, techniques, or tutorials.



Figure 4.7 – Screenshot of a post from Joshua Kirkham

This video post is a great example of educational content that directly addresses the audience's desire to learn and improve their own skills. By sharing a painting technique, the artist offers practical guidance to viewers who may be interested in learning how to paint landscapes or mountains.

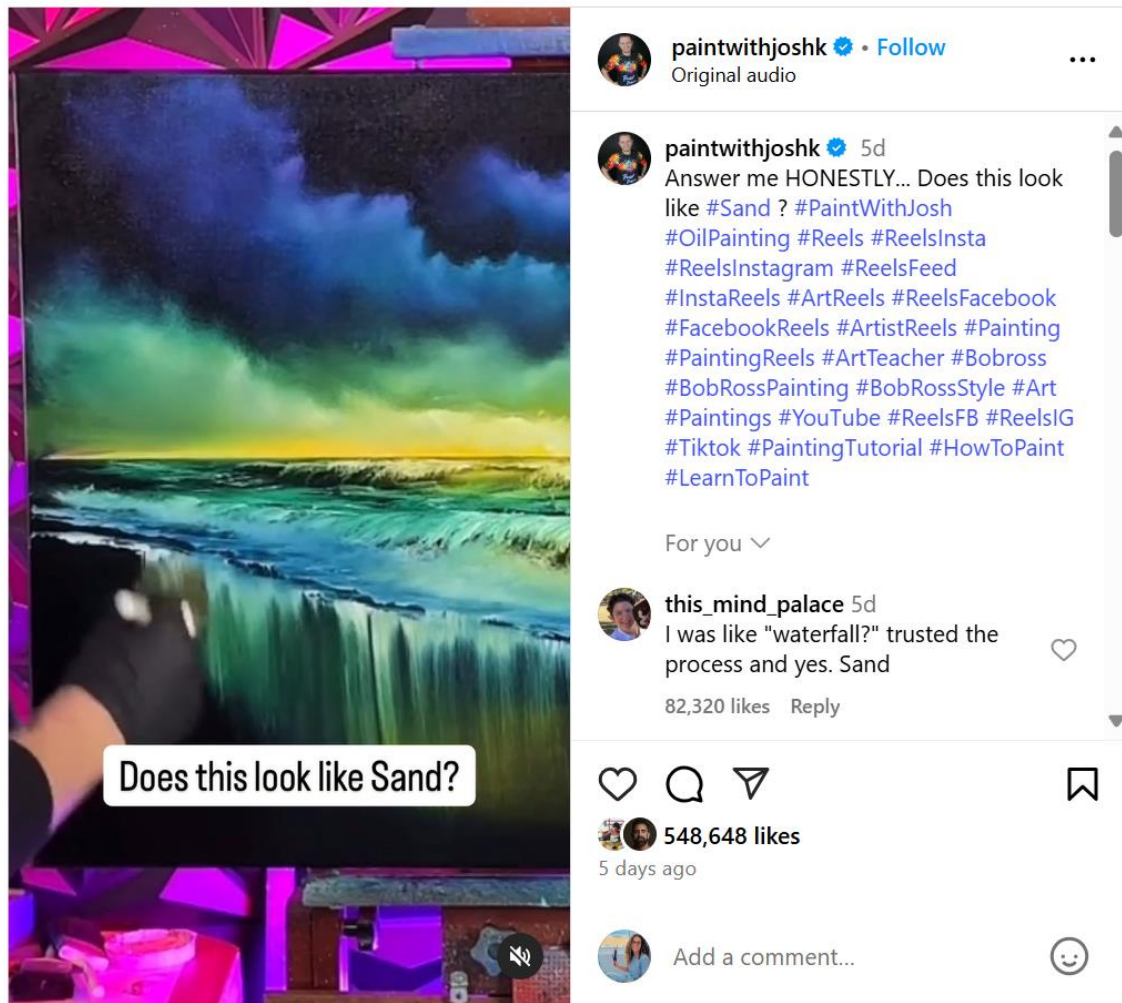


Figure 4.8 – Screenshot of a post from Joshua Kirkham

In this post, the artist combines an educational approach with a powerful hook to draw viewers in with the question "Does this look like sand?". The video starts with something looking like a waterfall, that supposedly should look like sand. The artist's approach here encourages the viewers to watch the video until the end, while simultaneously educating the audience about his creative process. Posts like this not only educate followers but also make them feel involved in the artistic journey.

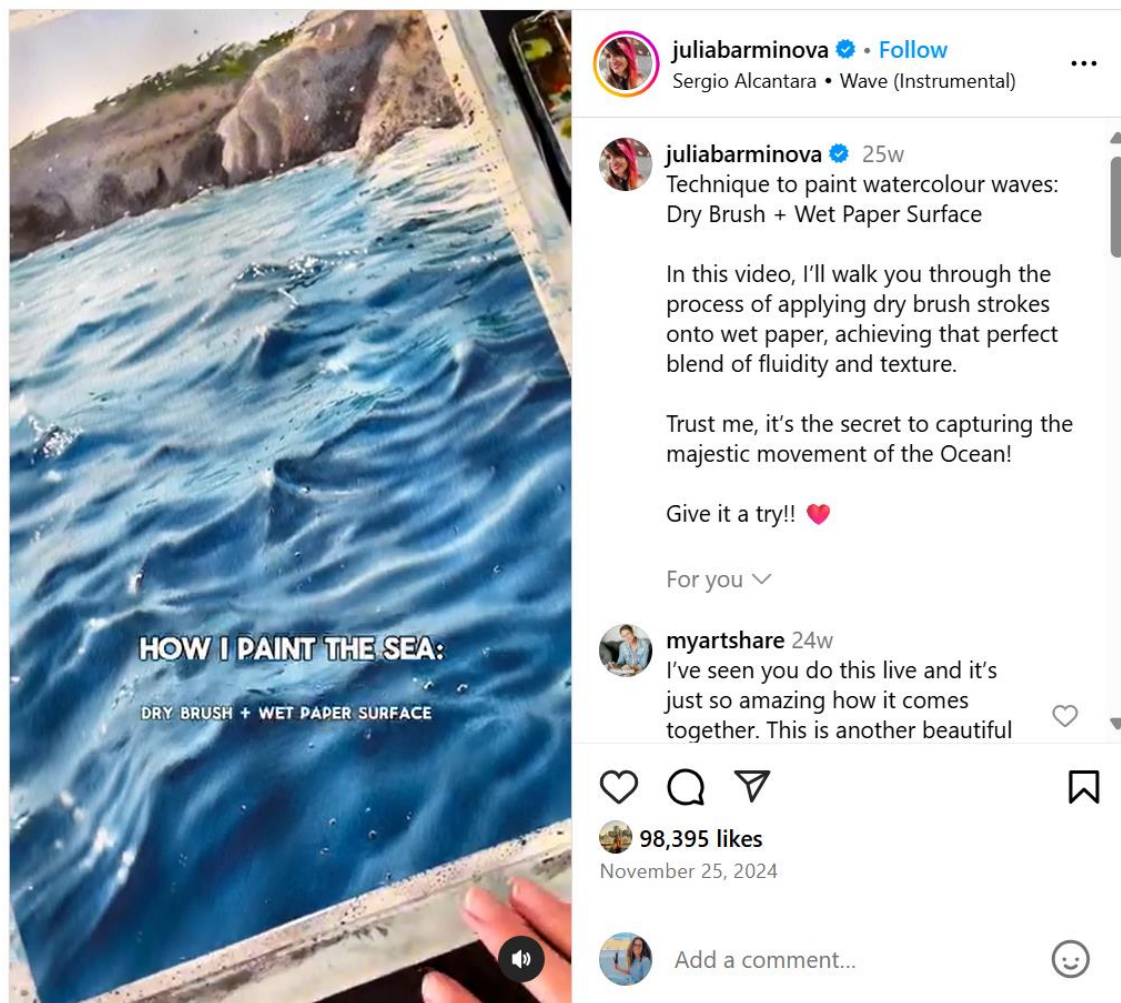


Figure 4.9 – Screenshot of a post from Júlia Barminova

In this post, the artist shares a specific technique used to paint ocean waves, offering a tutorial that breaks down the process step by step. By focusing on detailed art techniques and providing instructions for achieving the desired effect, the artist gives the audience advice that can be immediately applied to their own artwork.

4.3.3 SALES-FOCUSED CONTENT

Sales-focused content plays a crucial role in an artist's digital strategy. Posts with clear sales intentions directly aim to promote the artist's work and drive conversions. These posts often feature a direct call to action, encouraging followers to make a purchase, visit the website or know more about a piece or a collection.

Effective sales-focused content blends promotional messaging with some other type of content like behind-the-scenes, process videos, or storytelling.



Figure 4.10 – Screenshot of a post from Lily-Rose Burgess

In this video posts caption, the artist uses a strong call to action, urging followers to act quickly before the prints sell out. The phrase “before they sell out” creates a sense of scarcity, which is tactic to drive sales. In the video, by showing the progression from concept drawing to finished piece, the artist provides a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the creative process and emphasizes the contrast between idea and finished piece. This approach not only engages the audience but also taps into the fear of missing out (FOMO), encouraging immediate action.

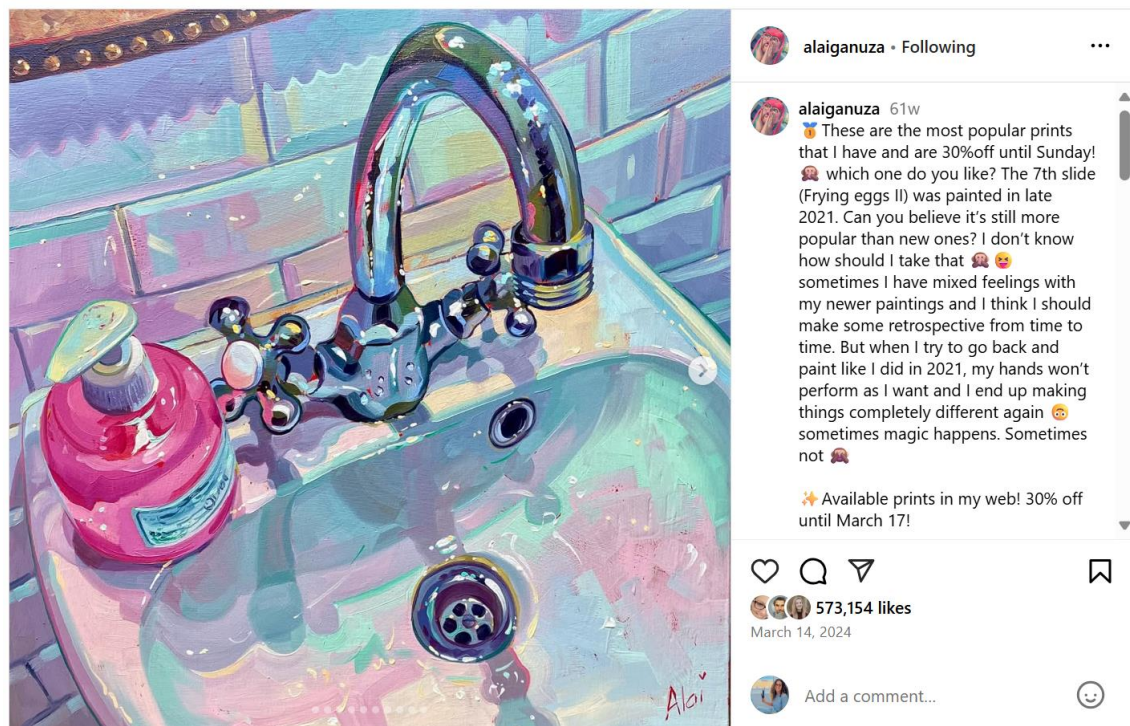


Figure 4.11 – Screenshot of a post from Alai Ganuza

This carousel post allows the artist to highlight multiple artworks, showcasing a selection of their most popular prints. By featuring a variety of pieces, the artist increases the likelihood of engaging a broader audience with diverse tastes. The 30% discount, emphasized in the caption, incentivizes followers to make a purchase while the sale lasts. Carousels are particularly effective in sales-focused content because they allow the artist to present a range of options, encouraging followers to browse through multiple pieces before deciding. The post not only serves as a promotional tool but also invites followers to explore the artist's collection, fostering a deeper connection with the brand.



Figure 4.12 – Screenshot of a post from Katharina Janzen

This post features a video that showcases the artist's creative process while working on the original "Eras Tour" painting. The process video and the caption sharing the inspiration behind the painting is an effective sales tool, as it creates a connection, which can increase the perceived value of the artwork. The accompanying caption promotes prints of the painting, appealing to those who may not be able to afford the original but still want to own a piece of the artwork.

The video uses very fast transitions, with clips lasting approximately one second, constantly changing angles or scenarios. This high level of dynamism captures viewers' attention, enhances retention, and makes the content more engaging in a competitive digital environment.



Figure 4.13 – Screenshot of a post from Devon Rodriguez

This video uses a strong hook to capture attention: the artist is painting at a train station, and two police officers approach, claiming that what he's doing is illegal. This fosters curiosity, making viewers want to know what happens next. This contrasts with the rest of the video, where the artist gifts some of his prints to people that cross his path. This hook and contrast encourage comments, with many viewers expressing their thoughts on the situation. In the caption the artist promotes the release of a new limited edition watercolor print, creating urgency with the 24-hour availability. This combination of storytelling, hook and sales-focused content creates a compelling narrative that keeps the audience engaged and drives conversions.

4.3.4 ART-CENTRIC CONTENT

These posts are dedicated to showcasing the artist's creative process, the story behind their work, the inspiration or specific art pieces. By providing a behind-the-scenes look into how art is made, artists invite their followers to appreciate the time, effort, and creativity involved in each piece. This type of content allows the audience to connect with the artist and the artwork on a more personal level, often making the final piece more meaningful.



Figure 4.14 – Screenshot of a post from Joanna Green

This process video begins with a captivating hook that immediately piques the audience's curiosity. By mentioning that the inspiration behind the artwork might be surprising, the artist sparks interest and encourages viewers to watch until the end to learn more. The artist provides a behind-the-scenes look at their creative process, while being vulnerable and humble by saying that she was unsure about the bold choice as inspiration.

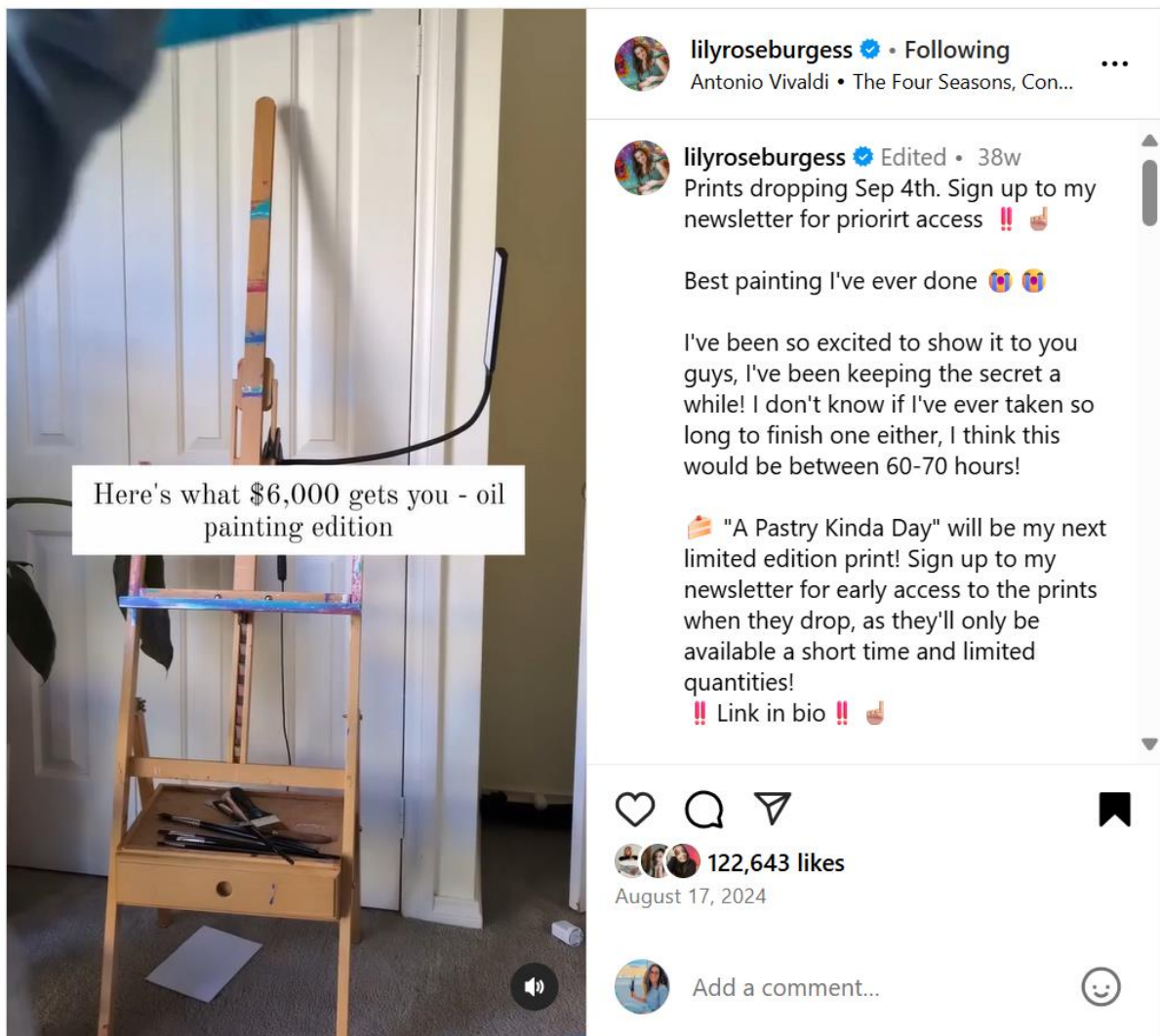


Figure 4.15 – Screenshot of a post from Lily-Rose Burgess

In this post, the artist uses the hook "Here's what \$6,000 gets you" to immediately draw attention about the value of the artwork. This type of content encourages viewers to discuss whether they believe the artwork is worth the price, generating a conversation around the perceived value of art. Because pricing in art can be highly subjective, the topic naturally triggers polarized opinions, where some viewers defend the price based on craftsmanship and artistic value, while others question it. This polarization stimulates debate in the comment section, as people feel compelled to express their opinions and respond to others, ultimately increasing engagement and visibility of the post. The artist further reinforces this by showcasing their meticulous process, from the first strokes to the final details, giving followers a deeper understanding of the effort that goes into creating such a valuable piece.

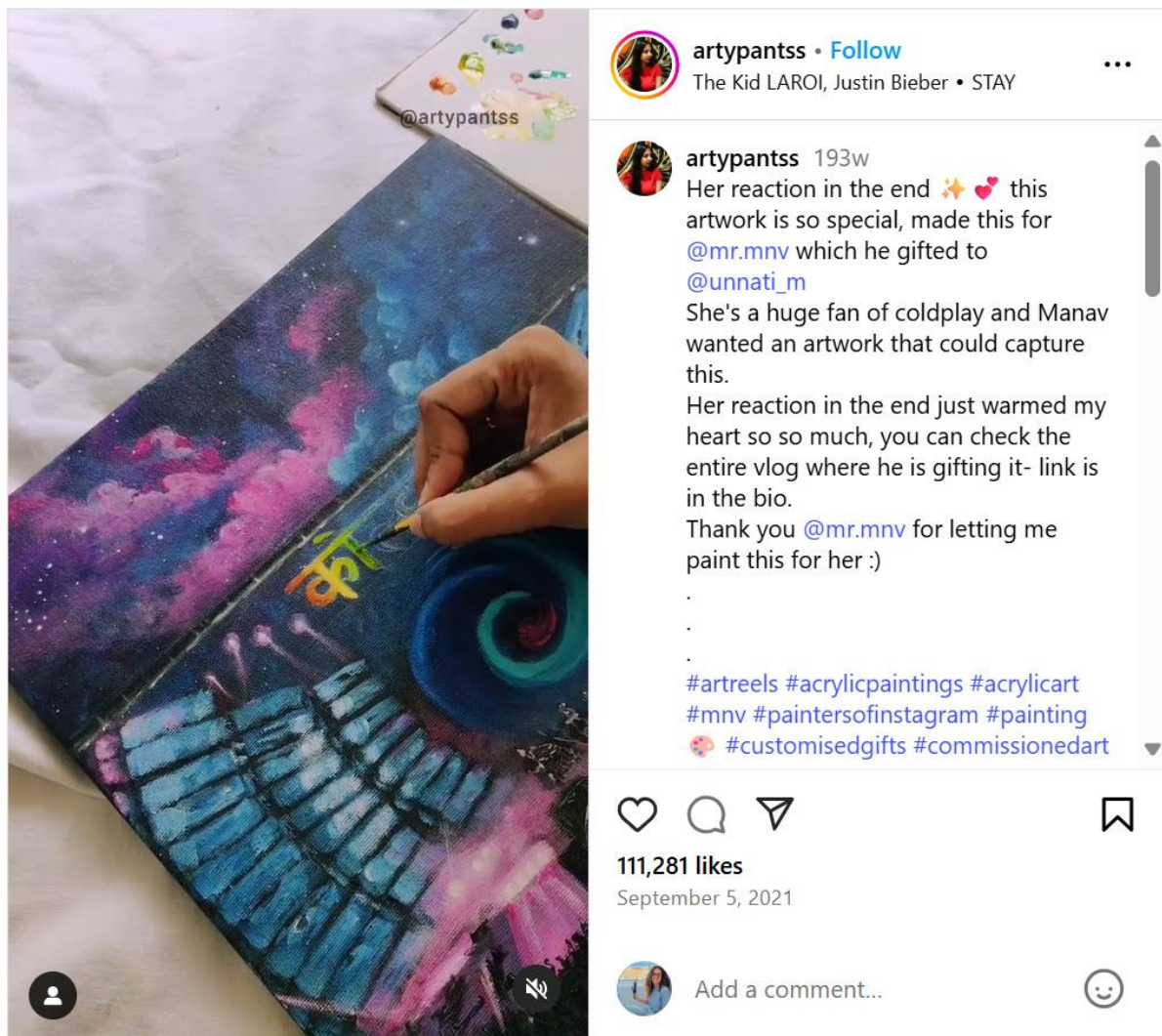


Figure 4.16 – Screenshot of a post from Ruchi Chauhan

This process video uses the emotional hook "Her reaction in the end..." to create suspense and intrigue, so that viewers continue watching until the revelation. The artist captures the moment when the person receiving the commissioned piece reacts to the final artwork, adding a personal and heartwarming touch to the post. This content humanizes the artist and highlights the emotional connection behind a commission.

In conclusion, this netnographic study highlights the evolving strategies that artists employ to navigate the digital art market. With the use of diverse content types and engagement tactics like hooks, artists are able to not only build a strong online presence but also convert that engagement into outcomes, whether in terms of engagement or sales. The study highlights the dynamic relationship between content creation and audience interaction, illustrating how digital platforms offer artists unprecedented opportunities to connect, create, and commercialize their work.

4.3.5 OVERVIEW OF CONTENT STRATEGIES IDENTIFIED IN THE NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Based on the analysis of the collected content, four main content categories were identified, along with a set of general content dynamics that apply across all categories. The following table summarizes the key content characteristics observed in each category and their respective purposes in the context of digital art marketing.

Table 4.12 – Four main content categories, characteristics and purpose.

CATEGORY	CONTENT CHARACTERISTICS	PURPOSE / EFFECT
PERSONAL STORYTELLING CONTENT	Vulnerability and authenticity; Sharing personal experiences, family moments, childhood stories; Behind-the-scenes, aspects of the artist's personal life; Emotional and intimate stories.	Builds emotional connection, humanizes the artist, fosters relatability, creates a sense of community.
EDUCATIONAL CONTENT ("HOW TO" OR "TIPS")	Tutorials and step-by-step guides; Demonstrations of painting techniques; Problem-solving posts; Educational hooks to keep viewers engaged.	Positions artist as expert, provides value to followers, increases engagement.
SALES-FOCUSED CONTENT	Strong call-to-action (purchase now because...); Scarcity tactics (limited-edition); Promotions and discounts; Product carousels showcasing multiple works; Storytelling or behind the scenes content combined with sales offers.	Encourages purchases and creates urgency.
ART-CENTRIC CONTENT (CREATIVE PROCESS & INSPIRATION)	Behind-the-scenes videos of the creative process; Sharing inspiration behind artworks.	Deepens appreciation, builds perceived value, creates emotional engagement.
GENERAL CONTENT DYNAMICS	Use of strong hooks to spark curiosity; Quick video transitions; Changing angles and scenarios; Dynamic, attention-grabbing visuals; Fostering curiosity, confusion or polarity with text or visuals.	Captures viewer attention, enhances retention, improves algorithmic performance, maximizes engagement.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 FROM PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL: EVOLVING CONSUMPTION JOURNEYS IN THE ART MARKET

This study partly supports the findings of Petrides & Vila de Brito (2024), who argue that while digital platforms contribute significantly to branding, visibility, and engagement, many artists still depend on physical interactions such as exhibitions, workshops, and networking events to convert visibility into sales. However, the present study expands on this perspective by demonstrating that, for a growing number of artists, a well-managed digital presence allows for a fully online consumption journey, where discovery, engagement, and sales occur entirely through digital touchpoints, and physical sales become complementary rather than essential.

These findings align with Nnenna (2024), who highlights how social media has democratized access to art consumption and allowed emerging artists to present and sell their work directly to a global audience, thereby reducing dependence on galleries, curators, and other traditional gatekeepers of the art market.

5.2 THE POTENTIAL OF EMAIL MARKETING

Furthermore, email marketing emerged as an underutilized yet powerful tool. Emails offer a more direct and intimate communication channel, often leading to higher conversion rates and deeper loyalty. While social media is a great tool to reach a wider audience, email marketing fosters and deepens connections with collectors and people who are already somehow interested in the artist and the art. As Chaparro-Peláez et al. (2022) demonstrate, properly managed email campaigns offer an effective tool for nurturing deeper relationships with potential buyers over time.

5.3 WHAT REALLY DRIVES INSTAGRAM ENGAGEMENT

One of the most striking insights from this study is that Instagram content performance is not primarily driven by metrics such as follower count, hashtag use, or caption length, as very often assumed. Instead, the value and relevance of the content itself plays a much greater role in visibility and engagement. Its entertainment value, informativeness, and emotional resonance are relevant topics in terms of performance of social media content. This finding suggests a shift towards content quality and understanding what the audience finds relevant or entertaining, over algorithmic “hacks.” Sharing practical information like tutorials or painting process is one of the common features of the most-liked and most-commented posts (Kang et al., 2019).

Moreover, Kang et al. (2019) emphasize that social media platforms activate several fundamental psychological mechanisms that influence user behavior, including reciprocity, social proof, liking, authority, scarcity, and commitment. These mechanisms help explain why certain content generates higher engagement levels: people are naturally drawn to content

that feels popular (social proof), comes from trusted sources (authority), or offers exclusive insights (scarcity). This perspective aligns with the findings of this study, which show that emotional resonance, authentic storytelling, the development of personal trust between artist and audience, and scarcity tactics are far more effective in driving engagement than purely technical metrics such as follower count, hashtag quantity, or caption length.

Another significant finding is the central role of storytelling, emotional connection and fostering a sense of trust and proximity. According to Kang et al. (2019) empathy, feeling like the artists' friends and like their contribution matters is crucial for posts performance. Posts that invited viewers into the artist's world, through authentic vulnerable narratives and personal inspirational reflections, were found to create more trust and connection. Many participating artists shared that a simple direct message (DM) with a short voice note sent to a potential buyer who had shown interest, often resulted in a sale. This breaks the perceived barrier between artist and audience, reinforcing the sense of authenticity and emotional connection that buyers seek. It shows that the artist is accessible and genuinely values the potential collector. This direct communication often acts as the final reassurance someone needs before making a purchase.

In terms of format, the research highlighted that Reels with high dynamism performed markedly better. Elements like frequent cuts, changing angles, and concise segments contributed to better attention retention, especially when combined with emotionally driven voiceovers or educational content. Another crucial element of best performing posts were the hooks. Starting videos by asking a question, arousing curiosity and/or confusion captures the viewers' attention and they are more likely to see the video until the end (Kang et al., 2019).

5.4 A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ARTISTS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

This research provides a practical roadmap for independent artists navigating digital platforms. It highlights effective content strategies (using Reels for discovery, email for nurturing, and websites for credibility and sales) while offering grounded insights on how trust is built through consistent and transparent interaction. These insights are especially valuable for emerging artists aiming to commercialize their work outside traditional gallery systems. Artists looking to improve their online presence should focus on five main aspects highlighted in the following list:

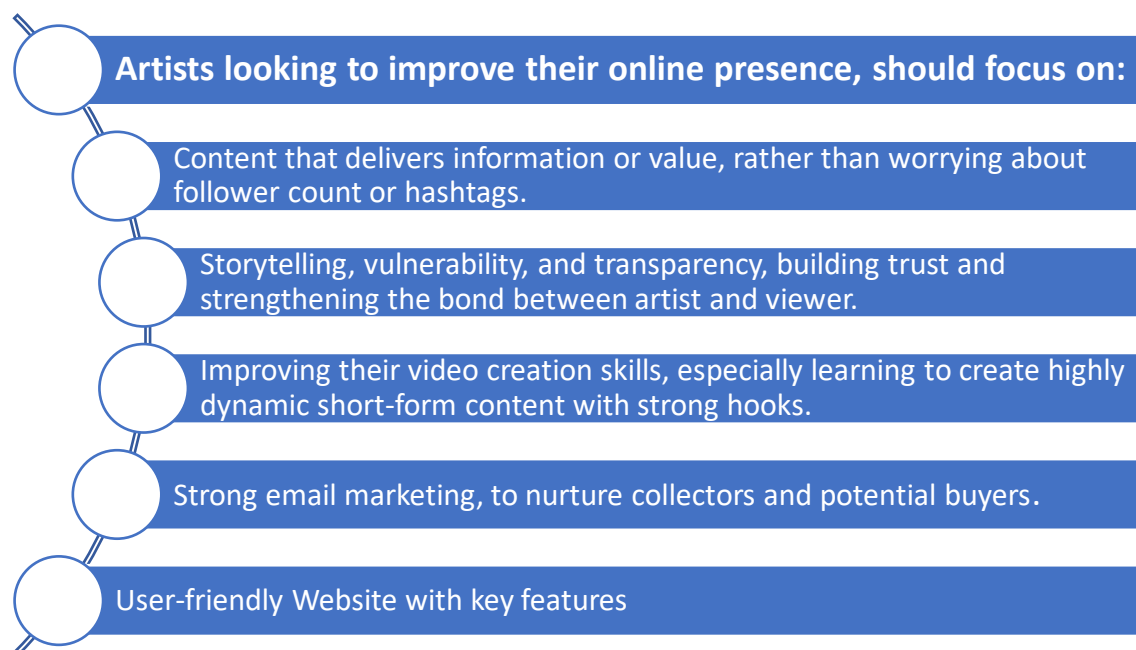


Figure 5.1 – Five main aspects artists looking to improve their online presence should focus on

5.5 THE DIGITAL ART CONSUMPTION JOURNEY

An important contribution of this study is the mapping of a new, digital art consumption journey that differs significantly from the traditional gallery-centered model. While conventional art consumption often required physical presence and was mediated by curators, galleries, and institutional gatekeepers, the digital journey unfolds across multiple interconnected online touchpoints, granting artists direct access to potential buyers. It explores discovery, engagement, and purchase, anchored in three main digital touchpoints: social media, website, and email marketing. This model builds upon and extends existing customer journey literature by applying it to the ‘digital’ and the emotional nature of the art market.

The journey typically begins with a moment of discovery, frequently triggered by dynamic content formats such as Instagram Reels, Stories, or targeted advertisements on platforms like Google and Instagram. These initial contacts often feature highly dynamic videos, characterized by quick transitions, changing angles, and strong hooks that capture viewers’ attention in the first few seconds. While this first exposure rarely leads to immediate action, it plants a seed of familiarity, enabling the audience to become increasingly aware of the artist’s presence.

Through repeated exposure to similar content, users start to recognize and feel drawn to the artist’s work and persona, leading many to follow the artist’s profile. This stage is often marked by a passive awareness phase, where followers consume content silently, observing the artist’s work, personal narratives, or creative process without actively interacting. Over time, this passive observation can gradually evolve into active engagement, reflected in likes,

comments, shares, or direct messages. These interactions signal growing emotional connection, trust, and interest.

Consistent with the findings of Demmers et al. (2020), this early discovery and engagement process aligns with the pre-consumption stage, where audiences respond particularly well to informational or value-driven content. Posts that offer behind-the-scenes insights, educational tips, or personal storytelling not only generate engagement but also position the artist as both relatable and knowledgeable, which reinforces credibility and authority early in the consumption journey.

As emotional connection strengthens, audiences are often directed through strategically placed links in stories, captions, or bios toward the artist's website. Once on the website, visitors may browse available works, review curated portfolios with high-quality images, read the artist's story, and encounter email opt-in forms offering incentives such as discounts, giveaways, or exclusive content in exchange for subscription. Subscribing to the mailing list represents a crucial transition into a more sustained and controlled phase of the relationship. At this point, email marketing allows artists to nurture trust, maintain consistent personal communication, and eventually convert interest into sales through exclusive offers, storytelling, or product launches.

Overall, the digital art consumption journey identified in this research is highly relational, emotionally driven, and non-linear.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research aimed to investigate how social media, websites, and email marketing are reshaping the art consumption journey, with a focus on the evolving relationship between artists and buyers in a landscape increasingly independent of traditional gallery systems. The study mapped this new digital consumption journey, evaluated the role of each digital platform, and analyzed how content strategies influence audience engagement.

In response to the research question: *“How does the use of social media, websites, and email marketing by artists impact the consumption journey of art buyers?”*, the findings demonstrate a clear shift toward a direct, digital art consumption journey. This transformation replaces the traditional gallery-centered model with a relationship-driven path, where content quality, storytelling, and trust play decisive roles. Social media enables the discovery and nurturing of interest, websites serve as transactional and informational hubs, and email marketing helps maintain long-term connection and loyalty. Together, these tools give artists greater autonomy and creative control over their own commercial success.

While this research offers important insights, it is also important to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the study focused primarily on Instagram, due to its widespread adoption among artists and art consumers, while excluding other digital platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube, which may also play a significant role in shaping the art consumption journey. Secondly, the chosen artists for the interviews were painters, possibly not fully representing all kinds of artists.

Future research could expand on these findings by analyzing more diverse samples and by conducting quantitative studies to measure the exact impact of content elements such as transitions, voiceovers, captions, or music in video performance. It could also examine how the consumption journey is influenced by various digital platforms (not only the ones analyzed in this study) and comparing their effectiveness in terms of engagement and sales, in order to provide a more holistic understanding of their individual and combined impact. It would also be valuable to the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence in content creation and marketing.

Beyond the academic outcomes of this thesis, the journey has also been a deeply personal one. As both an artist and a marketer, I have experienced firsthand the challenges, doubts, and possibilities of navigating the digital art world. I’ve learned that digital tools, when used intentionally, allow us to build real relationships, tell meaningful stories, and open doors that were once only accessible through traditional gatekeepers.

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APPENDIX A



This is to certify that

Project No.: **DDMKT2025-1-133424**

Project Title: **Digital Consumption Journey of Art Buyers**

Principal Researcher: **Filipa Andrade Silva Cabecinha**

according to the regulations of the Ethics Committee of NOVA IMS and MagIC Research Center this project was considered to meet the requirements of the NOVA IMS Internal Review Board, being considered **APPROVED** on 1/13/2025.

It is the Principal Researcher's responsibility to ensure that all researchers and stakeholders associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

The Principal Researcher is required to notify the Ethics Committee, via amendment or progress report, of

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change;
- Any unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification;
- The inability of the Principal Researcher to continue in that role or any other change in research personnel involved in the project.

Lisbon, 1/13/2025

NOVA IMS Ethics Committee

ethicscommittee@novaims.unl.pt

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

The interview questions were designed to align with the goal of answering the research questions. While an initial set of questions will be prepared for both artists and buyers, each individually, the semi-structured format allows for flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on relevant experiences beyond the predefined questions and for the researcher to add or eliminate questions if necessary.

For Artists:

General

1. Who are you and what is your art? (artist statement)
2. Do you focus more on traditional methods like exhibitions or on your digital presence?

Digital Presence

1. How would you describe your current digital presence?
2. Which platforms do you prioritize for each objective, such as showcasing your work, creative process, announcement of events and new pieces for sale?
3. In what ways has having a digital presence (website, social media, email marketing) changed the way you interact with your audience and potential buyers?
4. Do you feel like the majority of your sales are coming through traditional methods like exhibitions or because of your digital presence?

Social Media

1. Which social media platforms do you use most frequently, and why?
2. How do you balance personal storytelling and professionalism in your social media posts?
3. Can you share examples of how social media interactions have led to sales or significant engagement?
4. Do your clients buy after first having multiple digital interactions with you or immediately after discovering you? Describe what you think their journey is.

Websites

1. Do you have a website? *[If the answer is no, jump to the questions about Email Marketing.]*
2. What role does your website play in your overall digital strategy?
3. What features do you consider essential for an artist's website (e.g., e-commerce, portfolios, artist statements), and why?

4. Have you noticed any differences in buyer behavior or inquiries that come through your website compared to social media?
5. What portion of your sales do you think can be traced back to your website?

Email Marketing

1. Do you use email marketing to engage with your audience? *[If the answer is no, jump to the questions about Digital Touchpoints and Sales.]*
2. How often do you share and what types of content?
3. Have you found email campaigns to be effective in generating sales or fostering engagement? Can you provide examples?

Digital Touchpoints and Sales

1. In your experience, which digital touchpoint (social media, website, or email marketing) has been the most impactful in driving sales, and why?
2. How do you think the digital consumption journey of buyers differs from traditional gallery-based experiences?
3. What do you think artists can do better to utilize digital platforms effectively?

Understanding the Consumption Journey from the Artist's Perspective

1. In your experience, how do buyers typically move from discovering your art to making a purchase? What touchpoints seem most critical in this journey?
2. Can you describe a specific instance where a buyer engaged with multiple digital touchpoints (e.g., social media, website, email) before purchasing your art?
3. Have you noticed any patterns in buyer behavior that could indicate their readiness to purchase?
4. Do you have an example of a situation where the potential buyer seemed not ready to buy and because of something you did (engaging via direct message, offering a discount, sending an audio), the sale happened?
5. What role do you think storytelling or sharing personal narratives plays in moving buyers closer to purchasing?

APPENDIX C

35 Instagram accounts used for scraping and posterior text mining analysis:

1. <https://www.instagram.com/artypantss/>
2. <https://www.instagram.com/devonrodriguezart/>
3. https://www.instagram.com/johanne_bossmann/
4. <https://www.instagram.com/katharinaajstudio/>
5. https://www.instagram.com/asimeth_art/
6. https://www.instagram.com/thegreenhouseart_/
7. <https://www.instagram.com/hapo.studio/>
8. <https://www.instagram.com/fazel.shams.calligraphy/>
9. <https://www.instagram.com/rrebekka.art/>
10. <https://www.instagram.com/paintwithjoshk/>
11. <https://www.instagram.com/brittleeart/>
12. <https://www.instagram.com/textuuri/>
13. <https://www.instagram.com/juliabarminova/>
14. <https://www.instagram.com/drew.artista.marin/>
15. https://www.instagram.com/vitas_artworks/
16. <https://www.instagram.com/lindamannartist/>
17. <https://www.instagram.com/alaiganuza/>
18. <https://www.instagram.com/lilyroseburgess/>
19. <https://www.instagram.com/elizabeth.londen/>
20. <https://www.instagram.com/iz.krajnik/>
21. <https://www.instagram.com/saratarita/>
22. <https://www.instagram.com/carowendelinart/>
23. <https://www.instagram.com/kaws/>
24. https://www.instagram.com/banksy/?utm_source=ig_embed
25. <https://www.instagram.com/abstractsunday/>
26. <https://www.instagram.com/obeygiant/>
27. <https://www.instagram.com/felipepantone/>
28. <https://www.instagram.com/carolynj/>
29. <https://www.instagram.com/josielewisart/>
30. <https://www.instagram.com/okudart/>
31. https://www.instagram.com/b0rdalo_ii/
32. https://www.instagram.com/cj_hendry/
33. <https://www.instagram.com/jamesjeanart/?hl=en>
34. <https://www.instagram.com/joshuavides/?hl=en>
35. https://www.instagram.com/david_hockney/?hl=en

