

The Hype of Art Online

The perception of art in the digital era

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ABSTRACT

With a steady rise of social media platforms in our digitalized society, individuals experience significant changes in all areas of life. In particular, the relationship of individuals with art has changed drastically due to the rise of Instagram, as they perceive and consume art increasingly in a digital rather than in a physical space. As social media plays a crucial part in the everyday life of millennials, their exposure to and identification with art on Instagram, characterizes their perception of art's status in society. Although, Instagram has received increased attention from the art market, there still exists an apparent gap referring to the individuals' perception of art in the digital era. This thesis therefore examines how millennials that portray themselves as art enthusiasts via Instagram perceive visual art today and how they construct their identity on this platform. As part of this research ten semi-structured interviews were conducted and subsequently analyzed and coded. In a first result theme, this study reveals that digitalization significantly shapes the art experience of the millennial art enthusiast. In this regard, the accessibility of art on Instagram leads to increased popularity and perceived omnipresence of art while digital distractions and fast consumption of art via Instagram limit the art experience. Thereby, the digital transformation of society promotes the diversification of taste as well as the commercialization of art on social media. In a second result theme, this study illustrates that art is perceived as an extension of the digital self. In this regard, findings show that individual linkages of emotions and art determine individuals' identification with art and that the millennial art enthusiasts' taste regime is represented online, which facilitates the curation of their digital identities. Further, this study identifies a persistent elite dominance with respect to the status of art and its properties in an online curated taste regime. However, when others portray themselves as inauthentically belonging to the high-culture society on Instagram, this is perceived as hypocrisy. In conclusion, the findings reveal two opposing but parallel phenomena of individuals' art perception in a digitalized society: The diversification of taste versus the approximation of taste on Instagram.

KEYWORDS: Art, identity, audience, perception, Instagram

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical framework	5
2.1 Visual art and the aesthetic experience.....	5
2.2 Digitalization	10
2.3 Instagram.....	13
2.4 People, places and products on Instagram	15
2.5 Identity Construction	18
3. Methodology.....	22
3.1 Operationalization	23
3.2 Sample.....	24
3.3 Data collection and analysis	26
3.4 Ethical considerations	27
4. Results.....	29
4.1 Art experience is shaped by digitalization	29
4.1.1 Social media makes art more accessible	29
4.1.2 Online art consumption limits the art experience	33
4.1.3 Transformation of society is reflected in art online	36
4.2 Art as extension of the digital self.....	39
4.2.1 Individual linkages of emotions and art.....	40
4.2.2 The creation and curation of digital identities	42
4.2.3 The persistence of elite dominance and perceived hypocrisy	47
5. Conclusion.....	53
References.....	59
APPENDIX.....	64

1. Introduction

“Instagram creates a safe place to enjoy art. They feel part of the gallery before they walk in.”

(Reyburn, 2017)

As stated in the New York Times, Instagram has become the online game changer within the art market and is dominant in influencing auctions, the exhibition of art online, and gallery transactions, particularly for younger buyers (Reyburn, 2017). Therefore, Instagram has developed to be the leading social media tool attracting audiences below the age 35 (Reyburn, 2017). Today, exhibitions take place purely on Instagram, as done by a contemporary art museum in Miami Beach, which used Instagram to exclusively showcase digital art (Smith, 2019). It becomes very clear, that social media has reshaped the consumption and perception of art in a digitalized environment, attracting over 80 percent of Generation Y art buyers, that acquired fine art online in the past years (Artworkarchive.com). Social media did not only have an effect on art institutions but also on its visitors as well as on the creation and curation of art in a digitized society. Consequently, it reshaped how individuals perceive and experience art (Sokolowsky, 2017). Today, most art pieces exhibited in a gallery or museum are selfie-friendly installed into the space for popularizing the feeds of visitors on Instagram or Facebook (Sokolowsky, 2017). This popularity of art online generates highly attractive visual art events that are transported from the existing space to the digital world and makes visitors waiting in lines to become part of it (Sokolowsky, 2017). Art in the digital era can hence be characterized as tailor-made for the Instagram age (Sokolowsky, 2017). Positioning art works to ensure the selfie possibilities and shareability online and making the exhibition attractive for visitors is thus a grown concern for art institutions (Sokolowsky, 2017). Since people mediate their experience today through social platforms, it becomes more important how visitors can relate to artworks and how they create meaning for them (Sokolowsky, 2017). A recent study at Queensland’s Gallery of Modern Art Gerhard Richter exhibition illustrated that individuals utilize Instagram as a crucial element of their aesthetic experience, exemplarily visitors are posting themselves immersing into the exhibited artwork at galleries, “wearing clothes matching the art” (Suess & Budge,

2018, p. 1). Social media platforms allow individuals to connect to art in new ways by creating meaning for themselves in a personal way (Suess & Budge, 2018). The easy access and omnipresence of art online means a new way of interacting with it (Delaney, 2019). This transformation of art experienced and perceived online via social media evokes the question how differently individuals, especially millennials (being the age group that is steadily participating with social media on a daily basis), connect to art influenced by its experience and accessibility online. Most importantly, by recognizing that the social media platform Instagram promotes self-expression online and therefore serves as vital part of identity construction of an individual in the digital space (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). Digitalization has thus not only significantly affected the art market and its commercialization by the new market strategies applied to art sold, distributed and exhibited in an online environment and the popularization of art in mainstream segments, but also the way consumers perceive, buy, connect and identify with art via new channels online (Velthuis, 2012). The research question that will therefore be guiding this study tries to identify: How do millennials that portray themselves as art enthusiasts via Instagram, perceive visual art today and how do they construct their identity on Instagram?

This research attempts to elaborate how millennials in today's society perceive visual art online and how the perception of visual art has transformed in the era of digital media by critically assessing Bourdieu's (1984) theory of the perception of cultural goods. Furthermore, the digitalization of art and its presence and usage on the social media platform Instagram will be related to Goffman's (1959) reflections on identity construction and the staged persona. The study is explanatory in nature, hence empirical data is analyzed in a qualitative manner, and findings are deducted and interpreted in respect to the underlying theories depicted in this study.

The influence of social media is steadily rising and with it the proportion/number of individuals creating virtual profiles and identities, connecting, sharing and interacting with brands and institutions on a daily basis. Therefore, this study is relevant to art institutions, marketers, e-commerce and artists themselves. They can make effective use of knowing how the art enthusiastic millennials today perceive art and how this perception is related to connotations about art in everyday life. This group is of particular importance as it promotes art through new modes of communication and via multiple channels, which presents art online to a broader public and achieves popularization. Accordingly, this study serves as an overview to

illustrate the contemporary perception of art by millennials in the digital era. However, this study is further relevant for psychological and sociological regards, as it is highly connected to the construction of personal identity online and the perception of the visual aesthetic experience in a digitalized society. Hereby, this research demonstrates that art is perceived as an extension of identity that exhibits highly emotional values and that specific personas are purposefully constructed by individuals online to create an identity with significant attributes to perform a desired self. As most academic research focuses on the effects of digitalization on the art market and its economic transformation (Velthuis, 2012; Arora & Vermeylen, 2013; Mangold & Faulds, 2009), less studies investigate the effects of digitalization and new modes of consumption on the perception of visual art by individuals (Giannini & Bowen, 2019; Johnston, Baumann & Oleschuk, 2019) and its effects on identity (Leban, Thomsen, Wallpach & Voyer, 2020). However, the effects of digitalization and accessibility on art plays a crucial role to understand the meaning of art for the individual in today's society. In particular, as individuals increasingly play an active role in the creation, distribution, and evaluation of content online and thus influence the consumer market and its mechanisms as well as the popularization of places, people or products. As there exists an apparent connection to the construction of identity online, it is necessary to analyze how identity creation and art is related in a digitized society to understand how both elements simultaneously influence each other. This study attempts to fill this existing gap to contribute and build on current and research in this topic with special focus on investigating the development of taste within the segment of cultural goods (Leban, Thomsen, Wallpach & Voyer, 2020; Johnston, Baumann & Oleschuk, 2019) and identity construction via Instagram (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016; Shumaker, Loranger & Dorie, 2017; Singh, 2019; Seibel, 2019; Giannini & Bowen, 2019).

Firstly, theories of perception of cultural goods and the aesthetic experience are illustrated and discussed which is followed by the characterization of the digital era and the usage of social media which allows for new access to cultural consumption. In particular, the social media platform Instagram and its relationship to visual art and individuals is discussed. The next section elaborates on concepts about identity construction that is highly connected to digital transformations and the relationship with the aesthetic experience online and the individual, especially on Instagram. The findings are presented and interpreted with the attempt to answer the research

question. This study is finalized with a summary of the main concepts and the results presented in the conclusion.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to guide this study and to answer the posed research question, a theoretical framework consisting out of four crucial topics is examined in this section. This theoretical framework thus serves as fundamental basis to explore this study accordingly and to introduce relevant theories of previous research. First, visual art and the aesthetic experience is defined in its historical and contemporary context, encompassing studies on psychological processes of human perception and the emerging field of neuroaesthetics. Furthermore, Bourdieu's (1984) theory of perception of cultural goods and his concept of the habitus is discussed in more detail. Subsequently, the process of digitalization and technological advancements and its effects on society are outlined, with particular reference to critics on the classifications of Bourdieu (1984) by Peterson and Kern (1999) and Van Rees, Vermunt and Verboord (1999). Hereby, further effects of digitalization for the art market and the museum are examined, allowing for an overview of new and digital consumption patterns and accessibility. Thirdly, the social media platform Instagram is thoroughly illustrated with a focus on its motivations and benefits of usage for individuals. Moreover, the way in which Instagram influenced the portrayal of lifestyles and taste regimes and the commercialization of products, places, and people is discussed. Finally, the last section depicts current research of identity construction online and the curation of personas, which is linked to sociological theories of Goffman (1959) and the revelation of staged personas. The emergence of the Selfie and its relationship with art and the immersion as well as portrayal of the self is discussed to include the notion of contemporary visual imagery in connection to identity.

2.1 Visual art and the aesthetic experience

Art as human expression is a pre-historic development that has transformed continuously in correlation to the evolution of humankind (Laszlo, 2015). Art can hereby be characterized as human activity that exhibits the material and the consciousness sides of human existence (Laszlo, 2015). Visual art oftentimes plays a crucial role in displaying the zeitgeist of a particular epoch (Komorowski, 2016). Art is therefore closely connected to shifting circumstances within the society as a whole (Hodgson, 2000). A piece of art can hence be characterized as embodying human expression, in which the primarily purpose it not utility driven or functional but rather

transports meaning and value (Hagtvedt, Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). As art is inherently constrained to processes of visual perception, it is important to outline the functioning of human perception, which is related to the visual systems that have been formed by evolution (Hodgson, 2000). Individuals are inspired by objects that can be experienced in sensation. Humans are thus triggered to express how they perceive or feel about these objects and art as mode of expression, starts with its perception (Jacquette, 2014).

Perception is defined as process of making sense of the reality that surrounds us and includes the acquisition, interpretation, selection and organization of sensory information (Hagtvedt, et al., 2008). The perception of art in particular, is defined as cultural universal, although depending on various social as well as physiological elements (Hagtvedt et al., 2008). An artwork hence stimulates affective and cognitive aspects in the individual and the interplay of both finally shapes the evaluation of art (Hagtvedt et al., 2008). Perception is crucial to aesthetics as this word originally defines any sense of experience, however, the aesthetic experience is not bound to the realms of art (Jacquette, 2014). Within philosophy, aesthetics is concerned with the conceptual as well as theoretical features of art and aesthetic experience (Pearce et al., 2016). Apparently, art and the aesthetic experience overlay in historical and conceptual aspects, but are not identical, much more, the relationship between aesthetics and art does in fact belong to historical contingency and is not limited to the substance of art (Pearce et al., 2016). It is therefore important to characterize the concept of aesthetic experience in the boundaries of this study to achieve a profound understanding of the perception of visual art as part of an aesthetic experience.

Already for the ancient Greeks, aesthetics signified the study of perception through the senses (Laszlo, 2015). According to Markovic (2012), the aesthetic experience can be described as exceptional state of mind, which differs from everyday experiences. In particular, an aesthetic experience is not explained by the experience itself but rather by what happens with this experience in our mental economy (Nanay, 2018). Therefore, the aesthetic experience describes a psychological process by which attention is centered around a specific object, mainly when these objects surrender everyday pragmatic meaning and further transition into a new symbolic level of meaning, an aesthetic experience can occur (Markovic, 2012). The concept of aesthetic experience can be compared to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *flow*, in which a person is self-transcending without the connection of

space and time (Markovic, 2012). During this state of mind, individuals are significantly engaged with a current activity and increased involvement in its process (Markovic, 2012). Another concept associated with aesthetic experience is the concept of absorption through which an individual becomes fully immersed in the symbolic world and experiences himself/herself as member of this virtual reality (Markovic, 2012). On a neuronal level, aesthetic experiences emerge from sensory-motor, emotion-valuation and meaning-knowledge processes (Pearce et al., 2016). One of the most comprehensive models of aesthetic information processing is the five-step model according to Leder et. al. (2004) (Markovic, 2012). The five-step model exhibits the following stages: (1) perceptual analysis, meaning the processing of complexity; (2) implicit memory integration, the processing of familiarity; (3) explicit classification, the processing of style and content; (4) cognitive mastering, art-specific versus self-related interpretation; (5) evaluation, the measurement of mastering success (Markovic, 2012). The most significant aspects of the model, however, is the existing feedback-loop between mastering and evaluation. In other words, the outcome of cognitive mastering is constantly evaluated in reference of the success in understanding a specific artwork (Markovic, 2012). The evaluation process finishes with two important outcomes, namely: the aesthetic judgement and the aesthetic emotion, in which all stages are importantly connected to emotions (Markovic, 2012). If the processing was successful, positive emotions are created for the individual (Markovic, 2012). This model helps to understand how individuals perceive and reflect on visual art and underlines the identification with art itself.

Therefore, cognitive models that regard the aesthetic experience highlight the participation of fundamental perceptual processes such as memory, attention, emotion, and social cognition (Pearce et al., 2016). Research emphasizes the important role of psychological and neuronal processes that accompany the aesthetic experience to understand the biological origins of art in profound ways (Pearce et. al., 2016). Cognitive neuroscience has contributed two significant insights to the research of aesthetics (Pearce et al., 2016). First, it has characterized the brain's reward system when being involved in an aesthetic experience and the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Pearce et al., 2016). One of the biggest insights, hence, was that the valuation of art and other cultural objects is linked to the same neural processes that belong to rewards of food or drink and explain a tendency of a common currency of choice (Pearce et al., 2016). Second, it offered a differentiation

between various forms of pleasure, in which aesthetic pleasure has been categorized as reward that is not associated to the satisfaction of desires, meaning to like something without the need to actually possess it (Pearce et al., 2016). The field of cognitive neuroscience of art aspires to comprehend evolutionary mechanisms through which individuals are able to interact with art on multiple levels additional to a solely aesthetic level (Pearce et al., 2016). According to research, “these include reflecting about art’s self-referential aspects, understanding an artwork’s personal or social meaning, the relation between medium, style and content, grasping its significance in art-historical or art-critical contexts, and so on.” (Pearce et al., 2016, p. 9).

Importantly, aesthetic experiences emerge from a diverse interplay of elements associated with the individual, the object as well as the context (such as online or offline) that influences the aesthetic experience (Pearce et al., 2016). Thus, the aesthetic experience can transform over time through historical eras and it is important to acknowledge that the determination of the aesthetic experience is strongly related to cultural as well as historical composition of this concept (Pearce et al., 2016). Today, art is seen as a vital factor of everyday life and is crucial to the composition of culture (Laszlo, 2015). Importantly, art always has been part of our economy and is dominated by the power of the Western marketplace (Laszlo, 2015). Its social and aesthetic value is determined by this market force and heavily influences the notion of what can be characterized as art that is prestigiously valuable (Laszlo, 2015). These aspects are discussed in Bourdieu’s (1984) theories on the perception of cultural goods and the judgement of taste. Various theoretical approaches claim that art must be regarded as language-like system that individuals can only comprehend when being able to read its meanings (Markovic, 2012). Hereby, art needs to be defined in terms of the viewer’s perspective (the audience) (Hagtvedt et al., 2008). This is particularly interesting for this research as it will be analyzed how the art enthusiastic millennial of today’s society perceives art and how the aesthetic experience is shaped for him/her.

According to Bourdieu (1984) the audience maintains a quantity of cultural and economic capital which trigger their “attitudes, artistic preferences, bodily habits and cognitive competence – in short, their habituses” (Prior, 2005, p.125). He further classified cultural goods, according to their attributes, referring to this form of classification as symbolic production (Van Rees, Vermunt & Verboord, 1999).

Similarly, cultural goods serve as indicator for cultural stratification as well as for social stratification (Van Rees et al., 1999). According to Bourdieu (1984), this means that individuals incarnate “a system of schemes of action, perception and appreciation” from childhood and due to class-specific limitation. This system is called “the habitus” (Van Rees et al., 1999, p. 352). Consequently, the perception of art is dependent on previous experience and knowledge that shapes the very own ability of interpreting a work of art. Art perception illustrates an active mechanism of decoding works of art through socially-acquired processes of comprehension inherited by the audience (Prior, 2005). Bourdieu (1984) hereby argues, that the approximation and analysis of works of art correlates with early exposure to specific cultural goods due to privileged backgrounds such as cultured families or educational systems (Bourdieu, 1984). This aesthetic disposition rather portrays a form than a function and rises from the habitus an individual belongs to in a system of different fractions of society (Bourdieu, 1984). Members of this certain fraction of society that appreciate fine art and possess the ability to decode it belong to a certain habitus, which is further defined by a homogeneity of lifestyle of the members (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu therefore outlines social forces that are exhibited via aesthetic judgement (Prior, 2005). Members of society that possess great quantities of cultural capital can be referred to as equivalent aristocracy, a sort of cultural nobility that is determined by aesthetic competence (Prior, 2005). Within the concepts of Bourdieu, individuals that belong to the dominant class, which possess high volumes of cultural capital, are claimed to have legitimate taste and preference for higher status cultural consumption (Van Rees et al., 1999). Whereas the dominated classes possess smaller volumes of cultural capital and are expected to be inclined to middle-brow or popular taste which is defined as less legitimate cultural goods (Van Rees, et al., 1999).

Current research, however, has questioned whether the before mentioned distinction of the space of lifestyles according to elite culture and popular culture is representative in modern society (Van Rees et al., 1999). Although, the acknowledgement of fine arts is generally seen as representation of high-status, many individuals that can be characterized as belonging to this group exhibit interest in more diverse cultural consumption encompassing popular culture (Peterson & Kern, 1996). The study of Peterson and Kern (1999) has shown that highbrows are significantly more omnivorous as other groups and that this group has become

progressively more omnivorous over the course of time. Omnivorousness in this context needs to be defined as openness to everything, meaning to indiscriminately liking everything (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Consequently, there exist apparent shifts from snob to omnivore which are linked to transformations in social structure, beliefs, generational effects, and art-world dynamics (Peterson & Kern, 1996) which are expected to be observed by millennials according to their perception of art in a digitalized society.

2.2 Digitalization

By criticizing Bourdieu's early claims, Van Rees, Vermunt, and Verboord (1999) argue that our society is continuously transforming and outline the growing technological advancements and its effects on social structures that have taken place. Social, economic, and technological prosperity led to increased personal freedom and more autonomous and idiosyncratic behavior of individuals which resulted in more diverse taste and preferences (Van Rees et al., 1999). The Western society evolved towards a society with openness and the possibilities to overcome fixed class positions through an improvement of the social structure and developed educational levels (Van Rees et al., 1999). Further societal evolution included emancipation, individualization, material prosperity, and a transforming moral status quo (Van Rees et al., 1999). These implications of developments thus shaped more individual patterns of behavior and therefore rather neglected, that "people's choices in in one sector would automatically influence their choices in another domain" (Van Rees et al., 1999, p. 353). As stated by Peterson and Kern (1996), the rather cultured and high-status society experienced a shift from "snobbish exclusion to omnivorous appreciation" (p.900). This means that the cultured elite developed in such a way that it consumes diverse forms of art that rather belonged to a popular class or low culture (Van Rees et al., 1999). Instagram as a social media platform illustrates shifts in consumption than no other platform does. Not only with regards to the possibility to consume content ranging from low- to high culture in a minute scrolling the feed, thereby democratizing taste of a higher social class, but also vice versa by "showing the 'common people' how elites consume on their Instagram feeds, making exclusive tastes more visually accessible to consumers of various economic backgrounds" (Johnston, Baumann & Oleschuk, 2019, p. 373). Prior (2005) emphasizes the social transformation across the past decades as reflexive modernity and argues for a

rather fluid and diverse conception of stratification. As the audience and consumers of art has been evolved to become more diverse and broader, it seems necessary to move away from a unified model of class taste, in which the class alone is declared to be the adequate indicator of consumption patterns (Prior, 2005). Prior (2005) points out, that the transforming ways of visual consumption, the rise of mass education, and changes in economic infrastructure introduced a new middle-class segment and thus relates to the inadequacy of Bourdieu's early concepts according to Van Rees, Vermunt and Verboord (1999). Moreover, as stated by Prior (2005), advancements of urbanization and aestheticization have influenced the city and with it consumption habits of an augmented middle-class which destabilized the barriers between higher and lower cultural habitats. In postmodern theories the distinction that define cultural goods has been replaced with distraction (Prior, 2005). Perception has become uncorrelated to the dimensions of stratification, highlighting the fact that the visual image online has advanced in such a way, that the image can merely be perceived through pure gaze, as in times of Bourdieu, but is rather perceived in a fast, spontaneous and short-lived environment of today (Prior, 2005). The dissolution of higher culture is further accelerated by the loosening of geographic boundaries due to media and the digital image. These factors therefore promote a concept of liquid modernity in which individuals become increasingly individualized (Prior, 2005).

According to Deuze and Jenkins (2008), we need to understand the current global digital culture as "culture of remix and remixability" (p. 7). We find ourselves in a current state of media transition which can be characterized as hybrid media ecology (Deuze & Jenkins, 2008). The convergence culture paradigm tries to portray these developments in a contradicting media ecosystem (Deuze & Jenkins, 2008). This new media ecosystem is characterized by audiences that can produce and distribute content online and thus a restructuring of traditional power distributions in media took place (Deuze & Jenkins, 2008). Consumers have become co-creators and the democratization of media has opened new possibilities for individuals to tell their stories (Deuze & Jenkins, 2008). The rise of social media allowed for new access to content, thereby blurring the lines of real and virtual life (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Hereby, social media includes a broad area of word-of-mouth channels such as blogs, online chats or social networking platforms and is described as enabling the creation, initiation, and circulation of information online (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). These new communication systems are progressively operating with a universal and

digital language that incorporates the global production and distribution of words, sounds, and images which are personalized to the tastes of diverse identities of today's society (Castells, 2010). According to Castells (2010), the capability of a society to transform with new technological advancements shapes the society's destiny and affects historical evolution and social change. New modes of communication therefore influence life and vice versa (Castells, 2010).

The digitalization of art has significantly changed the way individuals perceive, evaluate or consume art (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013). Social media plays a crucial role in the process of digitization of art as it allows for the creation of communities and networks online through which art is represented in relation to the user of the social media platform (Castells, 2010). Hereby social media platforms help to facilitate communication and interaction. "They have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358). The emergence of social media facilitated a low barrier of entry for participation within the art world and created a new tension between the art expert and the amateur in an online environment (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013). According to Arora and Vermeulen (2013), the last decade displayed a shift in the realm of art which was determined by a constant pressure to interact with the audience and to acknowledge them as active consumers rather than as mere participants. Consequently, the art world was bound to open up and become more accessible for a diversified audience (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013). The developments of technology and the rise of social media platforms hence had significant consequences for conventional market mechanisms (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013). Within this new online environment of global character, the lines between high and low culture as well as between individuals and institutions became increasingly blurry (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013). As noted by Rani (2014), fine art has become progressively commercial which opened the art world for new consumer segments and audiences. Worldwide economic growth and accessibility allowed consumers to buy art more easily, especially due to new trends in art e-commerce (Rani, 2014). The online art market is estimated to obtain a growth rate of 15% with estimated total sales of \$9.32 billion by 2024 (Sutton, 2020). As suggested by the Independent online, art today can be affordable and offer a wide range of options such as poster prints via the e-commerce platforms Desenio or Junique (Cicurel, 2019). Art has

developed to become a commercial market system, which goes beyond attracting specialized experts but increasingly broad audiences (Rani, 2014). According to Rani (2014), contemporary selling of art online and social media has immensely influenced our perception, enjoyment and sources of information about art in today's society. As new media has helped to attract broader audiences to art and to open the former elitist society, he fears that art loses authenticity and becomes commercialized for the mainstream market (Rani, 2014).

As depicted by Giannini and Bowen (2019), the digital evolution influences our thinking, senses, aesthetics, and way of communication, therefore it is important to comprehend how museums are urged to evolve within a new digitalized society. Digital information is blending into the physical reality as crucial part of our environment (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Today's visitors of the museum are digitally equipped and express thoughts and feelings of the museum experience on Facebook, Instagram, blogs or Youtube (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). The museum of the future thus needs to be immersed in a digital landscape, as modern individuals are more and more physical and digital beings (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). These elements define a paradigm shift for museums in an emerging digital ecosystem (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Consequently, Giannini and Bowen (2019) describe the designs of exhibitions that will progressively include digital art which merges into "real-life immersive experiences" (p. 195). During the meeting of the Art Leaders Network in April 2018, the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City stated within his speech that museums today need "to learn to think digitally and fundamentally rethink how we think" (Giannini & Bowen, 2019, p.203).

With these new possibilities of consumption and experience of art within the framework of online and offline realities, it is necessary to analyze how the perception and interaction with art of millennials is influenced by the factors of digitalization and especially how the relationship to and with art is influenced by the most influential social media platform, namely Instagram (Casaló, Flavián & Sánchez, 2018).

2.3 Instagram

Instagram is referred to as conduit of communication by offering a social media platform that is highly linked to visual content and networking, through which it became the incarnation of the mass popularization of app-based photography (Leaver, Highfield & Abidin, 2020). Instagram hereby serves as tool to understand the

current media culture and digital society and its effects on the online and offline world (Leaver et al., 2020). Instagram is said to be the most used and most rapidly growing social media platform worldwide (Casaló et al., 2018). As of 2018, Instagram has had over 1 billion monthly users worldwide with a continuous increase (Kang & Wei, 2018). The social media platform that evolves around its visual content offers the possibility to like, share, and comment photos of users as well as following profiles of others that consequently appear in one's own news feed (Budge & Burness, 2018). These functions establish Instagram as highly interactive platform, allowing individuals to "communicate, collaborate, and share content with a global audience characterized by almost immediate response times" (Silva, Farias, Brigg & Barbosa, 2019, p. 2). Instagram therefore offers convenient service, great availability, and low costs (Silva, Farias, Brigg & Barbosa, 2019). The media circulating on Instagram can be characterized as spreadable media which creates higher engagement and empowers individuals (Silva et al., 2019).

Research shows, that young adults use their smartphone almost three hours daily, indicating the dependency on the online world and making Instagram one of the most favorable platforms due to its visualized communication for millennials (Huang & Su, 2018). Instagram functions on likes, social acceptance and social approval, while integrating the number of views and followers as important metrics (Huang & Su, 2018). Hereby, Instagram illustrates the uses and gratifications theory, meaning, that individuals on Instagram satisfy their own needs through the usage process (Huang & Su, 2018). In this sense, the gratification refers to a mental state which can be described as psychological delight that individuals achieve from their experience of using the platform (Huang & Su, 2018). It is outlined that the majority of individuals on Instagram post selfies, thus exhibiting personal use as motivation (Huang & Su, 2018). Users increasingly spend significant time and attention on Instagram and many only post pictures after intense selection process based on the expectation of receiving most likes and approval from other members on Instagram as possible (Huang & Su, 2018). Consequently, Instagram makes use of the pursuit of social approval that offers them a feeling of satisfaction (Huang & Su, 2018). A recent study illustrated the motivations of individuals using the social media platform while being in an art gallery (Budge & Burness, 2018). The revelation of the study showed, that the gallery visitors use Instagram to promote and recommend the exhibition online and to further encourage their audience to participate as well (Budge & Burness, 2018).

Images shared on Instagram hereby serve as device for acknowledging networks and experiences of cultural spaces (Budge & Burness, 2018). By observing visitors in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence it was revealed that most visitors photograph details of art which might be characterized as new way of social commentary via Instagram (Budge & Burness, 2018). These observations explain that the engagement of individuals with museum objects online is used to communicate shared experiences which define who they are as a person by using the visual image on Instagram (Budge & Burness, 2018). The access to art via Instagram and its usage possibilities announce a new form of amateur art connoisseur in the digital age (Arora & Vermeylen, 2013). These individuals do not necessarily need to have an art historical background in order to enjoy, share or evaluate art (Arora & Vermeylen, 2013). Through a bottom-up hype of art via Instagram, the millennial art enthusiast can be defined as counterpart to elite experts that dominated the field (Arora & Vermeylen, 2013).

2.4 People, places and products on Instagram

The sense of immediacy and the creation of communities that are enabling individuals to share experiences online resulted in the emergence of Instagram influencers, which are influential members of an online community with a rich amount of following (Casaló et al., 2018). Within the platform these influencers gain an immense share of voice and can influence their global audience as opinion leaders with respect to diverse topics such as consumption, information or dissemination (Silva et al., , 2019). As influencers typically share their daily life via images, videos or text on Instagram, they engage their audience effectively and create relationships with other individuals on the platform (Silva et al., 2019). Engagement in this context is defined as a multidimensional concept that includes affective, cognitive and behavioral levels within a commitment to an existing relationship (Silva et al., 2019). More specifically consumer engagement on social media platforms are characterized as the costumers physical, cognitive and emotional involvement in relation to a brand or product (Silva et al., 2019). Due to the large number of followers' influencers possess, they are able to significantly mobilize their audience and cause engagement (Silva et al., 2019). Consequently, influencers play an important role in today's strategic marketing communication processes of companies or brands (Silva et al., 2019). On the one hand, influencers function as endorsers of products or promote a

specific brand online with claiming its quality as well as benefits (Silva et al., 2019). On the other hand, “digital influencers offer their images to the endorsed product, transferring their characteristics, identities, and meanings to that promoted good or service; they bring to products characteristics of an extended self (...)” (Silva et al., 2019, p. 4). Influencers thus exhibit influential power in consumption decisions and are a crucial element of online marketing strategies of brands operating on Instagram that try to pilot particular consumption patterns (Casaló et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2019). Regardless of whether an art enthusiast (on Instagram) is an influencer, one of this study’s expected results is that also non-influencers carry out an influential function with limited reach respectively (i.e. smaller circles and online communities). This indicates, that the millennial art enthusiast is presumed to display similarities to influencers in terms of their motivation in using the visual image to narrate taste and promote art and their expectations in doing so.

In general, the influential function is frequently utilized by art e-commerce platforms and art institutions in order to promote products or exhibitions via influencers that represent a particular type of personality to their audience (Singh, 2019). Vice versa, art is commonly used in marketing to promote products (e.g. via advertisement) that consumers typically do not associate with art (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). Studies show that high-culture images draw significantly more attention to them. Therefore, when a company aims to leverage this effect with a product (e.g. could be a T-Shirt with an art print), art becomes intertwined with a specific product, which is more successful in the market (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). This strategy is defined as art infusion. When products represent a link to art, consumer perceptions and their assessments are affected (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). The evaluation of art works on consumer products elicit connotations of culture, luxury, sophistication, creativity and prestige (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). Therefore, research shows that a spillover effect occurs, meaning that crucial properties of art are becoming transferred onto the product (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). More specifically, it was found, that the presence of art provokes associations of luxury and exclusivity independent from the artwork that is displayed (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). Consequently, the utilization of art on products has a favorable effect, as there exists an inherited positive connotation of art regardless its actual content (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). In reference to the linkage of art and consumer goods, Instagram can serve as important platform to exert viral marketing especially for content that is

highly visual (Hausmann, 2012). Viral marketing can be characterized as “process of encouraging individuals (i.e. customers, users, visitors etc.) to pass along favorable or compelling marketing information they receive in a hypermedia environment” (Hausmann, 2012, p. 175). Instagram can hereby be utilized as platform to create popularity of products, persons or places (Hausmann, 2012). Social media can thus create viral effects for art institutions, visual content online can be used to unfold intangible cultural experiences and trigger the individual online on an emotional level, before the experience occurs in the offline world (Hausmann, 2012).

As more and more people are fascinated of the lives depicted on social media, influencers become popular by creating a personal brand of themselves (Leban et al., 2020). Current research suggests that influencers are capable of receiving status and distinction by having knowledge about a specific field or by co-creating and exhibiting particular taste regimes (Leban et al., 2020). Consequently, and contrary to Bourdieu’s class-limited comprehension of taste, a taste regime can thus be understood as a constructed normative system which illustrates the aesthetics of action within a culture of consumption (Leban et al., 2020). It will be expected that the results of this study can be further applied to the millennial art enthusiast operating on Instagram. Johnston, Baumann and Oleschuk (2019) explain a development of “new aesthetics of cultural diversity” (p. 373) that outlines the fast cycles in which cultural products are produced and in which elite brands are integrated into mainstream consciousness of today’s society. Nowadays, mainstream corporate products can very rapidly display cool counterculture trends (Johnston et al., 2019). Therefore, growing cultural abundance and diversity results in a democratization of access to elements of elite culture and illustrates its fast diffusion on society via platforms such as Instagram (Johnston et al., 2019). Therefore, the rapid transformation of media images democratize taste in which Instagram serves as platform that makes exclusive taste more accessible to individuals originating from diverse economic backgrounds (Johnston et al., 2019). Since individuals seek to create a narrative that differentiates themselves from others, they portray different taste regimes and lifestyles online, such as the millennial art enthusiast (Johnston et al., 2019). This is closely linked to the construction of identity that will be discussed in the following section (Seibel, 2019).

2.5 Identity Construction

As life shifts more and more online and social media platforms such as Instagram reach increasingly more audiences that create their profiles in a digital environment, it is becoming significantly important to investigate how individuals form their identity as digital beings (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Giannini and Bowen (2019) outline that the perception of the self takes place through our smartphone that acts as mirror of the world and individuals “digitally capture and curate their lives (...)” (p.88). Our identities today consequently have two appearances, one in the real and one in the virtual world. This fact turns connectivity to be the significant feature of the 21st century (Toscano, 2017). New social media platforms such as Instagram hereby offer the portrayal of new lifestyles, new forms of relationships or new ways of working that influence existing habits and shape the future of our reality (Toscano, 2017). Pessimistic attitudes view the physical and the virtual, according to these developments, as separate (Toscano, 2017). However, events in the real world affect the virtual world and vice versa. Therefore, both spaces should be seen as continuously merging in one world, as suggested by Toscano (2017).

The museum experience becomes documented via images, videos and stories online that serve as confirmation to have been taken part in this experience in the physical world (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). The digital identity thoroughly curated is thus linked to the global digital ecosystem (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). The search for identity in the digitalized society signifies the crucial source of social meaning (Castells, 2010). Today, individuals progressively attach meaning to what they are (or who they believe they are) and less on what they do in the physical world (e.g. professional occupation) (Castells, 2010). Therefore, the search for identity in the digital age is shaped by global flows of images, communication and symbols that are core components of modern life (Castells, 2010).

Since one of the primary motivation for Instagram usage by millennials is self-expression via curated online profiles, the social media platform exhibits strong linkages to identity construction (Huang & Su, 2018). A current research stated that the majority of posts by individuals on Instagram are selfies, which emphasize the pursuit of social validation via self-expression (Huang & Su, 2018). The selfie can be defined as a self-produced and self-selected documentary image, shared via social networking platforms in order to communicate the self at a specific moment in time (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). The popularity of the ‘Selfie’ in the era of social media depicts

an embodiment of digital identity and captures the current “‘me’ at the center of life’s experiences” (Giannini & Bowen, 2019, p.7). This practice becomes also part of the visitor activities in exhibitions and museums, by creating a relationship between the individual and the visual art that merges into an online appearance and thus contributes to a digital expression of the self in relation to art (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). This element can be characterized as the translation from physical into digital identity (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Today, visitors of museums or exhibitions do not only want to consume art, but they want to be part of it (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Hereby, the practice of the Selfie is a “mode of communicating the self” (Giannini & Bowen, 2019, p.9). Accordingly, the selfie serves to explore the self and identity, as the selfie offers the opportunity to observe ourselves in a particular moment in time (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). The selfie, therefore, illustrates different facets of individuals “such as the artsy side, the silly side, or the glamorous side” (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016, p.141).

Consequently, the images that are shared on Instagram function as artistic portrait that not only illustrates the physical appearance but more importantly, the personality, the individuals’ history and their experiences throughout life (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). As the recent study by Seibel (2019) outlines, the expression of cultural identity takes place via shared images by posting food, fashion, art or events, meaning that identity is constructed as social and cultural product. Additionally, individuals possess multiple identities which exist on a relational level, thus individuals create their profiles on Instagram around relational linkages via associations (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). In this sense, individuals curate and construct their identity online by illustrating what they associate with, such as interests, hobbies, people or institutions (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). Instagram, therefore, serves as platform to perform different identities through images of themselves (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). As introduced by Erving Goffman in his book *‘The presentation of the self in everyday life’* (1959), individuals have the notion to control or manage their impression towards others or audiences. He compares this face-to-face social interaction with theatrical performances. In other words, an individual will engage in performing an imaginary role of himself/herself (Goffman, 1959). An individual will thus try to adjust his/her setting, appearance or anything externally visible to achieve the impression the individual wants to create (Goffman, 1959). The audience on the other hand, tries to interpret the image created by the individual, through their

'performance' (Goffman, 1959). Most users of Instagram hence illustrate visual content about themselves that is sustaining a positive image online or at least an image that is purposefully intended by the individual which refers to Goffman's introduced signs and symbols in order to portray a glorified self (Goffman, 1959). These signs or symbols are used to create meaning for the audience (Goffman, 1959).

This positive and glorified representation of the self is critically discussed in current research, as the illustration of a singular positive side of the self can have negative implications for the audience and the individual. A study by Leban, Thomsen, Wallpach and Voyer (2020) focuses on the construction of online personas, in particular high-net-worth social media influencers illustrating their luxury lifestyle on Instagram and the integration of ethical behavior to justify their luxurious lifestyle in order to present a morally positive self. They argue, as already illustrated in section 2.3, that individuals can create specific taste regimes to exhibit their belonging to a particular group of individuals and to construct their persona online (Leban et al., 2020). These social constructions of taste regimes are linked to staged abstractions of identity (Leban et al., 2020). Hereby, the study refers to Goffman's (1959) theatrical metaphors of staging the self (Leban et al., 2020). It is characterized that a symbolic construction of identity is achieved by displaying the personality in a desired way (according to a narrated taste regime) via symbolic meanings or by illustrating related consumption symbolism (Leban et al., 2020). While pursuing the stage-related consumption patterns on Instagram, individuals thus apply "certain impression management strategies to present themselves positively towards others" (Leban et al., 2020, p.4). Furthermore, performance-related consumption practices display consumption roles and conduct (Leban et al., 2020). Stage- and performance-related consumption methods are connected and together lead the performance roles on the stage of everyday life (Leban et al., 2020). Therefore, the positive construction of identity online is not only attractive to the audience but also to the individual by evoking social belonging and approval of the illustration of the desired self and its attributes (Leban et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the strategy of a glorified self-representation can be seen as hypocritical and inauthentic to the audience. Another recent study in relation to the construction of identity online regards the popularity of a fake Instagram account, called "Finsta", that represents an individuals' unattractive facet of personality,

including embarrassing moments or struggles in life (Kang & Wei, 2018). The study confirms hereby the notion of individuals to represent a positive and desired self to the audience on their main Instagram account, which is referred to according to Goffman's (1959) front-stage "with their impression management activities labelled as a performance" (Kang & Wei, 2018, p.2). The explanation for the Finsta account on Instagram therefore emphasizes the fact that individuals have multiple identities that are directed by social context (Kang & Wei, 2018). While individuals tend to only show a positive self on their main account, thus a restricted singular identity, the Finsta account serves as possibility to express other parts of the self on the back-stage (Kang & Wei, 2018). In this sense, the front-stage and back-stage of their personality may be contradicting (Kang & Wei, 2018). Both recent studies reveal the possibility to curate and construct one's identity and further the ability to portray various personas online, the visual image therefore, is able to form and construct identity (Seibel, 2019). It is therefore presumed, that the staging of an identity (or multiple identities) by influencers online can be applied to any individual that intentionally creates a constructed profile on Instagram to show and share their personal interests, memories or experiences with an audience. The millennial art enthusiast is of particular interest, as he/she is actively participating on the platform Instagram and is able to use the features as highly visual tool in his/her favour to portray their personal identity.

3. Methodology

In order to analyze the perception of- and the relationship with art online, face-to-face interviews have been conducted and analyzed to construct in-depth understandings of personal associations on this research topic. Due to the fact that the research question is explanatory in nature, this study was approached in a qualitative manner (Gubrium, 2012). The in-depth interviews have been conducted by an inductive mode of research, as this method illustrates a particular relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Gubrium, 2012). Hereby, the method enables the researcher to gather profound information compared to other qualitative methods (Gubrium, 2012) and allows the interviewer to explore the participants thoughts and actions (Polkinghorne, 2005). In particular, the choice for in-depths interviews in this study is characterized as meaning-making, since it addresses personal subjects of the interviewees and regards their values and beliefs on certain topics (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2013). Consequently, this specific type of qualitative method is adequate to investigate the participants perceptions and feelings regarding art online and can appropriately elaborate on their behavioral patterns. Most significantly, in-depths interviews aim to generate new understandings from the data, therefore, the method rather produces new data and does not only gather previous existing data (Gubrium, 2012).

This research follows a semi-structured interview which exhibits a topic guide that has been attached in the appendix. This topic guide builds the basis of the semi-structured interview and serves to generally guide the discussion during the interview. Nevertheless, a semi-structured interview should still allow for flexibility and freedom during the interview process (Adams & Cox, 2008). The In-depth interviews illustrate open-ended questions and follow-up probes that are included in the topic guide to guarantee explicit understanding of the interviewee's perceptions, ideas or sentiments (Rosenthal, 2016). The initial set of open-ended questions that were utilized in this study are: (1) experience and/or behavioral questions; (2) sensory questions; (3) value/opinion questions; (4) knowledge questions; (5) questions that regard feelings, and finally (6) demographic questions (Rosenthal, 2016). This set of open-ended questions covers the necessary topics of interest to elaborate on the perception of art in a digitalized society. Importantly, the subjective responses of the interview do not account for overall generalizability.

3.1 Operationalization

The interview guide (see Appendix) encompasses six different sections. The first section is an introductory section and discusses elementary perceptions regarding art and the aesthetic experience of the interviewee, how often the interviewee visits a museum in the course of six months and if the participant was already exposed to arts and culture since childhood. The topic guide is further structured around the presented theory which includes, visual art and aesthetic experience, digitalization, Instagram, People, places and products on Instagram and identity construction. The last section of the interview includes demographic questions.

The first section of the interview guide thus starts with associations of visual art and the feelings connected to it (Komorowski, 2016; Markovic, 2012; Bourdieu, 1984). Further, it will be distinguished between the experience of art online compared to offline and how the interviewees perceive a possible influence of art perception by the physical and social space (e.g. the gallery). Accordingly, it will be assessed what makes art tangible and how they feel about new exhibitions that emerged such as the Selfie Museum. This question was moreover connected to their perception of online and offline realities and if they feel that individuals want the aesthetic experience of the physical world to be part of their online realities (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Finally, this section includes the interviewees perception of art merging with fashion on the example of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the streetwear brand Daily Paper (Hagdvedt & Patrick, 2008). This question should trigger their perception of the status of art in society and its transformation.

In order to appropriately assess the effects of digitalization on art perception of millennials, the next section of questions address the classification of the interviewees according to their digital background and preferences of online consumption. However, the posed questions of this section are less compared to the other sections of the topic guide, digitalization is addressed throughout all of the sections as this study aims to investigate the perception of art in the digital era. This section hereby only includes questions about digital consumption and usage. Interviewees are firstly asked if they have been growing up with social media and how much they incorporate social media in everyday life (Huang & Su, 2018). Furthermore, they have been asked how they inform themselves about art, artists or current exhibitions and whether they have already bought art online and their attitudes towards art-e-commerce platforms (Giannini & Bowen, 2019; Arora &

Vermeulen, 2013). Finally, the interviewees have been asked what it means to them to possess art at home and whether this is related to the creation of an aesthetic experience that illustrates facets of personality.

The fourth section of the interview addresses the social media platform Instagram. Within the first part of this section, the questions refer to preferences and activity on Instagram and if they feel like art and its promotion on Instagram increased in recent years (Silva et al., 2019). Therefore, the next questions ask whether their relationship to and with art may have changed because of the platform (Budge & Burness, 2018; Leban et al., 2020; Johnston et al., 2019). Furthermore, questions regarding their own behavior on Instagram such as their reasons for posting art-related images or stories and how they would describe their personal profile. The last part of the questions is linked to the interviewees perceptions of other individuals portraying themselves as art interested on Instagram and the creation of aesthetically pleasing profiles (Silva et al., 2019; Leban et al., 2020).

Finalizing the elaboration of art perception in the digital age, the next section of the interview is focused on identity construction, in particular online. This section thus builds on studies on the sociological creation of identity (Goffman, 1959) and the concepts and implications of digital identities in the 21st century (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016; Van House, 2009; Shumaker, Loranger & Dorie, 2017). The first question regards the description of the interviewee's own identity and their own definition of identity in general. This is further linked to their identification with art and how art can display identity. In particular, they are asked whether they perceive as some individuals or even themselves try to create a certain image online and if this image differs from the offline to the online reality (Leban et al., 2020; Kang & Wei, 2018). Finally, the interviewees are asked whether they feel like an online persona can more easily be constructed and what they themselves wish others to associate with their personal profile online.

3.2 Sample

To analyze the data collected through the interviews, the sample needs to be tailored respectively to the specific sampling criteria. The sampling method in this research was purposive sampling, as it enables for specific interviewees which adequately contribute to a desired outcome (Rosenthal, 2016). The sample of this study was selected in multiple ways. In the first round of sampling, Instagram users

have been approached online by searching with three relevant hashtags (#artlover, #artenthusiast, #artsy) and by tagged photos on Instagram profiles of museums and exhibitions. Two interviewees were found according to this method (Iris & Sina).

In order to facilitate the sampling criteria, the interviewees for this study at hand are between 20 and 35 years old, thus being part of the demographic age group of Millennials, since this group is mostly exposed and in contact with social media on a daily basis and furthermore being the age group mostly engaged in art e-commerce (Reyburn, 2017). In addition, the adequate interviewees for this study need to have access to social media (more specifically, hold an Instagram account) and currently follow at least three art-related profiles via Instagram. Art-related profiles need to exhibit at least one of the following characteristics: inspirational profiles which contain pictures through which art is recognizable, influencer profiles illustrating a strong direction towards art (by posting art related photos with themselves or purely the art content), art e-commerce platforms such as Junique or Desenio, art institutions (galleries, museums, exhibitions, art fares etc.) or artist profiles. These sampling criteria refer to a description of an amateur art enthusiast, meaning that the individual does not need to have specific knowledge about the industry (by having studied art related subjects, working in the art field etc.) but rather exhibits general interest and passion about the subjects. These criteria are seen as sufficient benchmarks to elaborate on the research question as it addresses the general perception of art of millennials in the digital era. The selected interviewees however do not need to be highly active on social media or Influencers themselves in any sense, although the sample may include interviewees belonging to this group. Active means, that the interviewees visit Instagram 5-6 days each week and post stories and/or posts at least four times within a month. Furthermore, the interviewees do not necessarily belong to a specific country of origin or residence since the relevance mainly regards online perception. Other than these pre-conditions, the sample should rather include a great variety of interviewees to allow for diverse perspectives on the population that will be examined.

The next rounds of sampling relied on the direct recommendation of other appropriate interviewees. Hereby, the selection of the interviewees encompassed snowball sampling, as this method relies on direct contact to other potential interviewees of one participant in the study. All of the interviewees matched the sampling criteria, two of the participants however obtained further art specific

knowledge by having studied art history, another participant is an artist herself, thus adding diverse value to the sample in total. The interviewees are between 21 and 27 years old, all female and of different nationalities and countries of residence, they all obtained a higher education degree and are currently working or are students (see Appendix for details). The total of ten participants in this study have saturated the required data for analysis and to elaborate on the research question accordingly.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The ten interviews for this research were conducted between April and May 2020, only two out of ten could be held in person due to the outbreak of Covid-19. All other interviews took place via Skype. This method still allowed to create a personal interview atmosphere, ensuring a fluid procedure. All of the interviews were held in English and the participants were asked to orally agree to the informed consent of the interview, thus giving their permission to be participant of this study and to be tape recorded. All of the obtained data was treated anonymously, therefore, the names used within this paper are fictitious. Overall, the interviews lasted from a minimum of forty minutes to about a maximum of one hour and thirty minutes. All of the interviews were informal and followed a normal flow of conversation, in which the respondents could hereby easily share their experiences, thoughts and feelings throughout the interview process. The interviews were recorded via phone and further uploaded to the transcription software Temi¹. This software facilitates the transcription process by transcribing the content with a speech recognition software. Nevertheless, the transcripts needed to be thoroughly modified and adjusted to correct possible errors.

To analyse the data, the interviews have been coded via the program Atlas.ti. The first round of coding included an initial process of breaking down and comparing all the data to achieve a first overview. On this basis, a second round of coding was used to group together the initial elements that emerged from the first round of data analysis. This step further facilitated the elaboration on the crucial topics that revealed the main insights of the interviews. Simultaneously, thematic analysis was used in order to systematically label and organize the data which outlined important insights and patterns that emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis enables the characterization of elements that are important and valuable for

¹ <https://www.temi.com>

answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data was coded in such a way that it connects to the theoretical framework and enabled the systematic search for underlying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Accordingly, these codes were translated into themes, through which generally three to five themes are developed (Rosenthal, 2016). In order to elaborate the data extensively a six-phase approach according to Braun and Clarke (2012) was applied. This approach included: (1) familiarizing the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing report (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Within this study, two major themes emerged from the data with three subthemes for each general theme respectively.

In order to ensure the rigor of this study, a constant process of verification was applied to incrementally guarantee reliability and validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). Although reliability and validity are critically discussed concepts in qualitative studies, they are mainly associated with trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003). In this study, verification strategies that ensure trustworthiness and the overall quality of the research, included activities to guarantee sampling sufficiency, coherence, the development of a flexible connection between sampling, data collection and analysis and theory development (Morse et al., 2002). Crucially, the role of the researcher and his/her creativity, sensitivity and flexibility shape the reliability and validity of a qualitative study (Morse et al., 2002).

3.4 Ethical considerations

Adequate ethical principles and the protection of humans within a study should form the base of any research (Arifin, 2018). However, ethical considerations have a particular importance in qualitative research, as a consequence of the intense interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Arifin, 2018). This importance is crucial to recognize, as the interviews deal with highly personal, subjective or sensitive topics of an individual in which the participant is expressing own feelings, thoughts or opinions. To ensure ethical principles in this study, the research process incorporated ethical guidelines. Initially, all of the interviewees gave their oral consent to participate in this study voluntarily and have been informed about the interview process, their rights (such as the freedom of choice not to answer a question) and the fact of being tape recorded for the solely purpose of facilitating later transcription of the interviews. The information obtained from the interviews was treated

anonymously and confidentially by protecting their identity. Therefore, the names of the participants have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participant and the interviews proceeded in a confidential environment. These ethical principles were strictly followed within the stage of data analysis and the dissemination of the results of this study.

4. Results

The results present the analysed data in relation to the discussed literature and current research to reveal significant linkages that emerged throughout the analysis. The data of the interviews is split into two major themes. The first theme illustrates that the art experience is shaped by digitalization. This section illustrates how social media is making art more accessible and omnipresent, how online art consumption limit the art experience and finally how the transformation of society is reflected in art online. The second theme deals with art as extension of the digital self and thus encompasses the following topics as emerged from the interviews: the relevance of individual linkages of emotions and art, the creation and curation of digital identities and lastly the persistence of elite dominance and perceived hypocrisy.

4.1 Art experience is shaped by digitalization

The overall theme art experience is shaped by digitalization relates to the perception of art by millennials in the digital era and the consumption patterns of art today. Therefore, this theme illustrates how the accessibility of art on social media leads to increased popularity and omnipresence on a platform such as Instagram and how digital distractions and fast consumerism limit the art experience online as compared to the offline experience. The theme finally displays the transformation of society that promotes diversification of taste and perceived commercialization of art respectively. As all of the participants are actively involved in social media, and more specifically Instagram, the modern way of consumption of art in a digitalized environment serves as key to understand the correlation of art evolution and the evolution of the society.

4.1.1 Social media makes art more accessible

As stated by Giannini and Bowen (2019), the rise of social media allowed for new access to content, with blurring lines of real and virtual life. This notion was generally confirmed by all interviewees in this study that mainly started being involved in social media by age 12-15. All participants clearly stated to use social media, particularly Instagram, to receive art news, follow brands or access inspirational content. Although, some participants estimated their daily incorporation of social media within the range of lower percentages (on a scale from 0%-100%), when being directly asked during the interview, they later on made clear to be actually more active than

earlier estimated. Most of the participants agreed that they are highly involved within the social media world, specifically Instagram, and integrate it into their everyday life due to the fact that some participants work within the field of social media on a professional level, because they are themselves artists promoting their art on the platform, or are privately active due to personal interests and motivations. As Paula explained: “Yes, 95% definitely my life revolves around this, my work revolves around the tool and my after-work activities (...). I mean we live in a digital era, and that's like Instagram” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager). All interviewees referred to Instagram as their favorite platform due to its visual content and easy access of diverse content. Hereby, one main finding was that all of the participants perceived an evident increase of art on social media in recent years and that access to art is facilitated online.

“I do. And I don't know if that's because of the development that the art industry is making or because I'm getting older and my social circle is getting more interested in art (...) So, I'm definitely seeing more arts, like increasingly on my, social media platforms. But I don't know what the reason behind that is. (...) I think it's definitely art is becoming more popular amongst more diverse social groups and it's also just because my social circle and the people I surround with are becoming more interested in arts at the same time.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

Some of the participants clearly stated, that art on Instagram is subconsciously consumed throughout the day without even recognizing it as it is perceived as omnipresent online.

“I would say consciously would be maybe once a month or two times a month, but then I also follow a lot of art accounts on Instagram and I would say without even realizing sometimes that it's art, I consume it on a daily basis, sometimes, for hours when I get lost on Instagram.” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

Due to the increase of art online and its omnipresence, all of the interviewees felt like their relationship with and to art has changed accordingly. Especially the majority of the interviewees without art historical background felt more connected to art and mentioned to receive more information of art online because of its accessibility.

“I think so. Because I don't really consider myself really knowledgeable of arts or anything, but with following art on Instagram, and just the different kinds of arts you see, it feels way more accessible and really feels like, you don't have to be someone who goes into the museum all the time to, to be interested in arts or to enjoy it.” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

The access of art to broader public and the development of an amateur art enthusiasts thus resonates with previous research, which illustrates the bottom-up hype of art via Instagram and the emergence of the millennial art enthusiast that can be defined as counterpart to elite experts that dominated the field (Arora & Vermeylen, 2013). The art world became more accessible due to social media platforms and reached broader and a more diverse audiences as social media was seen as crucial to receive news and information on diverse topics on a global level, this generally reflects the changed traditional market mechanisms in the art sector due to digitalization (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Moreover, as this study shows, the new millennial art enthusiast expects mass content of art on social media, as everything becomes rapidly digitalized (Giannini & Bowen, 2019) and with offering a great amount of content published online every minute. Nina expressed: “I mean, everything's going online now, you know, everything is digitalizing, so obviously it's clear that museums are doing this as well” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication).

Some of the interviewees clearly expressed that online presence of institutions or brands on social media would be expected, therefore, confirming the arguments of the apparent need of digitalization of art institutions or galleries (Rani, 2014; Arora & Vermeylen, 2013; Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Almost all participants in this study referred to digitalization of art thus as necessary, as everything is moving to the digital level. Therefore, on the one hand, the access of art online is perceived as positive, one interviewee hereby mentioned, that her desire to consume art in general increased because she sees more content online:

“For sure. It definitely has made me appreciate art more and the more I see it, the more I also want to explore it. So the more I see art and I see increasingly like more things that I like and that I find aesthetically pleasing, it gives me that like energy or like it, it makes me want to, you know, look for more art things, look for more designers, look for more museums near me, around me.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

On the other hand, the constant information and omnipresence of visual content on platforms such as Instagram is perceived as negative, as some of the participants felt overwhelmed by the access of content. Iris hereby stated: “Well, I speak for myself, but I think I consume more images online than I can handle. Like I think I get drained and overwhelmed really fast” (Iris, 24, Artist). Approximately half of the participants in this study felt like the promotion of art, art e-commerce platforms or galleries has increased in recent years:

“What I really found interesting was the collaboration of the fashion influencer Caro Daur with Art Basel. She obviously had a paid collaboration, she travelled there and posted everything on her social media, showing the exhibition. I thought it was very interesting that Art Basel invests in her, but why not? She makes great publicity.” (Feline, 24, Student in Art History)

This argument therefore illustrates that art on social media is linked to marketing objectives in order to create popularity of products, persons or places within the art world that can have viral effects within the online environment to achieve emotional connotations and intangible reference of art before the offline experience occurs (Hausmann, 2012; Silva et al., 2019). Instagram is perceived as mass popularization platform by all the participants in the study regarding its content and distribution possibilities within the art sector (Leaver et al., 2020). As Nina points out:

“I think one of the greatest examples is the Instagram Museum. I think their way of, making art accessible for everyone is really smart. They just made a museum that's both very artsy and also very aesthetically pleasing. So, for people to take really nice pictures for Instagram, everyone was sharing it on their social media and that just made everyone else want to go there, well even people who are usually not interested in art, they actually went to the museum. I think that's the perfect way of getting people interested in art and museums by just making it easy to step on the bandwagon and then roll with it.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

This statement emphasizes the perception of art as accessible and omnipresent on Instagram, while stating that this new form of accessibility attracts younger and more diverse audiences to art, that have not been interested in it before. This further shows that individuals feel like they can more easily get involved with art online and that the popularization of art on social media creates attractive viral effects for museums and art institutions. Nevertheless, the success of art e-commerce platforms via social

media can only be partly confirmed by this study. Questioning previous research and the observed increase of millennials buying art online (Rani, 2014), most participants of this study have never purchased art online, although they are exposed to art on a daily basis. Two out of ten participants purchased art either directly via Instagram or via an art e-commerce platform. Nevertheless, all of the participants stated, that they would like to buy art online in the future, therefore still confirming a positive trend according to previous studies and statistics (Rani, 2014; Reyburn, 2019).

In summary the analysis within this sub- theme shows that the accessibility of art on social media leads to increased popularity and omnipresence of art.

4.1.2 Online art consumption limits the art experience

All interviewees perceived increasing blurring lines between the offline and online reality due to digital advancements and social media platforms, especially when it comes to art (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Paula hereby expressed:

“The lines are going to be keep blurring (...) and it's just going to be a whole new world of the art. And I think people that are not part of it now really have to get on it because the train is moving really quickly. With everything happening right now, I think it's going to speed up majorly.” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

Nevertheless, the statements of all interviewees revealed that there exists a clear differentiation between the feelings art can evoke in a physical space and the feelings perceived by the individuals when perceiving art online. They all outlined, that although same feelings regarding a piece of art can occur online as they would offline, this perception of feelings is still regarded as limited and less intense, thus the aesthetic experience is negatively affected when perceived digitally:

“I think it's great that museums are doing this (online tours), but I haven't participated in one yet. And I think I also will not do it because I think for me to consume art digitally, I really prefer the medium of Instagram. Whereas I think for me going to an exhibition or a museum physically is something very special and I think I just wouldn't enjoy the same kind of feelings online. I like different forms of art on Instagram, for example, digital in general. But I would not like to look at paintings in a classic kind of sense on my phone (...). I think in a

museum it's just more of an experience.” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

This was further confirmed by Iris, the artist:

“I'm not a big fan of seeing stuff online cause it stays an image. (...) it's almost transcendental through my screen. I just I need the physical being of the work and see how it's made and seeing how big it is. You also never really see how big something is on the screen.” (Iris, 23, Artist)

The visit of a museum was always linked to a whole experience and perceived as something special by all of the interviewees, which clearly differentiated it as compared to the online perception of art. The consent of mainly all participants was that online tours of museums are regarded as innovative idea and logical incentive of museums as they experience the merge of the digital and the physical realities (Toscano, 2017), however, they still preferred the experience in a physical space. The offline aesthetic experience of art allows for more senses to be involved and almost all interviewees expressed, that the curation of the physical space can have a major impact in the perception of artworks:

“So, I think how it was designed and decorated has a lot of influence on the way you perceive things. If you're looking at painting, it's better to have natural light. But for some art pieces if you see it maybe in the dark it gives more of a mysterious feeling or a bit more like emotional or passionate or intense. So, it intensifies your emotions. I think it has a big impact on how you perceive art, the way the environment shows it.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

The perception of art in a physical was hence characterized as more intense experience that involves a greater amount of emotions and senses involved in this experience, whereas the perception of digital art was clearly characterized by most of the interviewees as additional source of inspiration regarding art or as pure entertainment seeing art online:

“I could imagine that if I just like quickly browse through it, my brain doesn't even really think about it that much. Whereas in a museum I stare at it for at least like five or 10 minutes. I feel like online sometimes it's more of pure entertainment when I think about it” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

Amina hereby strongly confirmed the apparent differentiation “Maybe it’s more superficial online and limited. I think it’s harder to get my attention. And in a museum, I would stop at every piece and look at it” (Amina, 26, Working in Risk Management). Interestingly, most of the participants therefore outlined, that the consumption of art on social media is characterized by fast browsing through Instagram, in which art is rapidly and rather unconsciously consumed. In the physical space however, art receives more attention and individuals tend to spend more time to perceive and relate to the art and hence attach more value to it:

“Whereas on Instagram we consume it much more like quickly maybe, but more unconsciously. I also feel like we, of course we expect new content to come way quicker, on Instagram. So, we constantly want to see, new content. I think definitely, when we consume art digitally, we perceive it very differently and I think we value it way more if we see it in an exhibition.” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

The perception of art online is bound to digital distractions and fast consumerism that is felt limiting the aesthetic experience of art for the interviewees as compared to the offline experience:

“I mean, there are just so many distractions nowadays, I mean, I think online media is just one of the greatest things of our generation, but it does have so many distractions. And if, for example, you're in a museum you're completely in that space.” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

This insight is confirmed by previous research regarding the impact of digitalization on art consumption and perception and the development of a society that consumes visual images in a fast, spontaneous and short-lived online environment (Prior, 2005). This study hereby reveals, that the attention span online is significantly perceived as limited by the interviewees, whereas the attention on art in a physical space is perceived as more focused and centred, therefore the perception of art and its evaluation is affected. Most of the participants stated to sometimes feel overwhelmed by the amount of visual images and content on Instagram which makes it more difficult for the individuals to extensively focus on art online. These perceptions confirm previous research and the description of psychological processes that accompany the aesthetic experience and explain it as the focus of attention around a specific object that surrenders everyday pragmatic meaning (Markovic, 2011).

Consequently, the participants are able to perceive art more intensely when being fully immersed in the experience itself that takes place in an activity with increased involvement (Markovic, 2011).

In summary the analysis within this sub- theme shows that digital distraction and fast consumption on Instagram limit the experience of art online.

4.1.3 Transformation of society is reflected in art online

One main finding in this study describes the perception of the interviewees that the evolution of art correlates with the evolution of society. The interviewees perceived that the digitalization of art results from the development that our society became digitalized as well, the digital transformation has thus shaped society and art simultaneously. They all expressed that they viewed art as reflection of society which constantly evolves with humankind (Laszlo, 2015; Komorowski 2016; Hodgson, 2000). The Selfie Museum is perceived as reflection of the current society they are part of, hence art is perceived as being mirrored by society and vice versa. Paula stated during the interview: "It's really connected to our society and our values. And maybe when we see the Selfie Museum as, also maybe as a modern way of art, right. Because we, as humans evolved into this direction" (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager). This perception is confirmed by previous studies (Komorowski, 2016; Hodgson, 2000), enabling art to become the mirror of a particular zeitgeist that is shifting with societal developments. Hereby it became evident, that the aesthetic experience is connected to cultural and historical compositions (Pearce et.al., 2016). As outlined by Van Rees, Vermunt and Verboord (1999), technological advancements provoked shifts in society with linked effects on the art world and the consumption of cultural goods. As digitalization in all areas of life takes place, for all of the participants it was obvious that this means that art as well has to adapt and evolves according to modernization of society. Consequently, the high engagement and participation on social media attests the urge of museums to offer experiences that are in line with a digital landscape, since modern individuals are more and more physical and digital beings (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). The apparent modernization of the museum in order to adapt to the current zeitgeist of society is perceived by all the interviewees. Iris clearly mentioned, that while working as tour and workshop guide in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, the museum aspired to modernize its exhibitions and offerings in order to attract younger audiences:

“I actually worked as a tour guide there. So, I give a tour, to students from like 16 to 20 and then we did a painting workshop. I try to connect more people in these workshops with diverse cultural backgrounds to get them go to the museum. I think they are really trying to modernize the museum and want to make it cool.” (Iris, 24, Artist)

This indicates, that not only art evolved with society, but that also institutions and museums necessarily need to modernize and adapt to societal changes and according to new digitalized consumption patterns. All participants stated that the selfie plays a crucial role within our current generation (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016). As Dania mentioned: “I think the Selfie Museum is about our society. Art became more and more accessible and part of our reality. Taking a selfie in the museum shows us being artsy” (Dania, 25, Student in Culture & Economics). Consequently, all participants agreed that the Selfie Museum constitutes a positive solution to attract younger and more diverse audiences.

“So, I think incorporating these like new concepts and ideas might allow other people who wouldn't usually go to museums or experience art make it more pleasurable for them. I mean art is constantly changing. Art has never been the same. If you look at what was considered art 2000 years ago, it's so much different now. So, I think it makes total sense that art is emerging with selfie and your personal experience and trying to make people live in art. You know, it just flows with how we emerge or, how we develop as human.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

The accessibility and modernity of art today therefore is able to reach broader and more diverse audiences on social media. All of the interviewees perceived individuals and the society as a whole more diversified. Due to this diversification of society they perceived art to have become more diversified as well, as art corresponds to new diverse taste and preferences of a digitalized society (Van Rees et al., 1999). This notion is further confirmed by some of the participants who felt like art is becoming more diversified and cosmopolite as the society is becoming increasingly cosmopolite and with possessing greater individual freedom:

“But now, you know, with all these different cultures emerging and people migrating and mixed races and all of that. You can also really see that in arts, things are mixing, patterns are mixing. The ways of making art is becoming

really strange and weird. But you know, that's also how us humans are becoming, I guess.” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist)

The perceived modernization of art by the participants is closely related to other creative industries such as fashion. Almost all of the interviewees expressed that the merge of fashion and art, makes art more accessible to diverse audiences and attracts broader audiences by creating synergies. Therefore, collaborations between fashion and art were characterized as a modern way of illustrating art in society. As Sina said: “The collaborations that are happening right now between fashion designers and social media, it's really on its way to changing the meaning of art and the way other people perceive art” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist). It becomes thus evident, that the meaning of art and its perception is affected by the linkage to other creative industries and its accessibility online. All interviewees stated that the linkages of art to other creative industries (such as music, fashion, cinema etc.) illustrates a diversification of taste:

“Oh, for sure. It definitely became cool because just like I said, it's so easy now, also for teenagers to listen to ASAP Rocky, but it's also cool to have that painting. It definitely became cool because music artists were involved in art, so people who were interested in music got in there and then fashion got in there. So, people who were interested in fashion but weren't interested in paintings got interested in it because now they're, in fashion and it's artsy and you've gotta be artsy, to be different. And it just goes from there. I think it also goes from a place of I want to be different. And then, somehow that's cool.”
(Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

Creative linkages thus promote art and contribute to its popularization online since the diversification of taste is represented by individuals on Instagram (Hausmann, 2012). The results of this study, the perceived diversification of taste by the participants, resonate with current studies illustrating a democratization of taste on platforms such as Instagram on which individuals can consume content ranging from low-to high culture in a minute by scrolling the feed (Johnston et al., 2019). This perception highlights the dissolution of higher culture online (Prior, 2005) and an occurred shift towards omnivorousness appreciation (Peterson & Kern, 1999). All of the participants perceived art has become commercialized in recent years. As Paula therefore noticed: “It's nice to see how art evolves because you can see,

expressionism and like some of the Dali paintings being so commercialized, but still it's also nice" (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager). This perception emphasizes on the development of new aesthetics in a modern and culturally diversified society, in which elite brands and products are incorporated into the mainstream consciousness of today's society (Johnston et al., 2019). Therefore, this study confirms current findings indicating that the growing cultural abundance and diversity illustrates the democratization of taste, its access and fast diffusion due to platforms such as Instagram (Johnston et al., 2019) and the display of taste regimes that display a specific culture of consumption online (Leban et al., 2020):

"And I really like how fashion is merging with arts because, I think this is honestly the best way, merging art with social media as well. It's one of the best ways to get younger people. (...) Because as I said before, museums and art are seen as so stereotypical or boring. Only people who are nerdy go to museums. That's the kind of status that it's got in society. So I think collaborating with other creative industries like fashion, and on social media is just the best way of telling other people that art is not necessarily boring paintings in a museum and that art can be anything you want as long as it connects to your interests and your feelings and what you think is aesthetically pleasing." (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

Consequently, the perceived diversification of taste, new access to cultural consumption online, and the commercialization of art into mainstream consciousness through fast moving media images contradict Bourdieu's class-limited comprehension of taste and cultural consumption and thus indicates that the evolution of art correlates with the evolution of society. The millennial art enthusiast embodies the contemporary art connoisseur that is accessing and distributing knowledge, interest and taste of art via social media platforms.

In summary the analysis within this sub- theme shows, that the transformation of society promotes diversification of taste as well as commercialization of art and this is reflected in art online.

4.2 Art as extension of the digital self

The overarching theme of art as extension of the digital self encompasses topics regarding the construction of identity and its motivations in doing so within a digital

framework. Hereby, this theme discusses individual linkages of emotions and art and the creation and curation of digital identities in today's society. It is further outlined how the construction of identity is related to persistent elite dominance and its perception by millennials as well as its hypocritical controversy. The results discussed in this section illustrate the evidence of art as extension of the digital self in a modern and digitalized society.

4.2.1 Individual linkages of emotions and art

Art and the aesthetic experience are generally perceived as highly individual by all participants and mainly linked to emotions that are connected to it. The majority of possible emotions mentioned were surprise, anger, happiness or inspiration. It was difficult to define precisely what the aesthetic experience means, for most of the interviewees, the consent was described as something different to everyday life or at least the observation of the specific object needs to be a conscious activity in order to evaluate its aesthetic (Jacquette, 2014). This is reflected by the five-step model by Leder and the related sensory-motor, emotion-valuation and meaning-making processes of an aesthetic experience (Markovic, 2012; Pearce et al., 2016). As Nina expressed her definition: "You see something and it's not just like you don't see it on a regular basis, but it's like put together on purpose so well that it like pleases your eyes or something" (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication). When talking about the aesthetic experience many of the interviewees directly connected it to something that is aesthetically pleasing, which was explained as something beautiful relating to its form, colours or shapes that pleases the eye. All of the interviewees mentioned that on Instagram exists a great amount of aesthetically pleasing content and profiles, that are seen as inspirational and positive, thus displaying the brain's reward system when being involved in an aesthetic experience (Pearce et al., 2016):

"There are so many accounts that are just literally called aesthetics. I love that I follow these aesthetic accounts, but I do make my own as well, but that's purely just because I'm interested in that creative side of it." (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

The aesthetically pleasing Instagram profiles (introduced as "aesthetics accounts" by Paula) are therefore rather associated as inspirational source for the interviewees.

Evidently, individuals relate to the digital aesthetics they can consume on a daily basis via Instagram and further associate emotions or moods to this experience that expresses aspects of their identity:

“I think for me it also kind of depends on what kind of mood I am. Sometimes art is just something I like to look at because it's aesthetic or it just looks nice and is beautiful, but I think art can also be very touching. I think depending on what kind of mood I am, so it can be entertaining on one side, but also very touching and making you think about, things.” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

However, all of the respondents made clear that defining something as aesthetically pleasing is highly individual and not every aesthetic experience needs to be necessarily aesthetically pleasing since it was mentioned that an aesthetic experience as such does not imply to be something beautiful per se, but rather something that catches the attention of the observer (Jacquette, 2014):

“It's all about the emotions. If we call a rock art or a chair, it's part of the lifestyle, it's part of the values and the ideas art shows. So, for me personally it's like a sense of belonging to my personal identity.” (Lia, 24, Student in Communications and Working in PR)

When being further asked how the participants identify with art they perceive, they mostly expressed that the identification is related to personal past experiences and personal preferences. Furthermore, the context of the artist plays a crucial role according to the interviewees in this study, thus the perception and evaluation of art is bound to emotional processes (Markovic, 2012):

“I think, I always try to look at it like intersectional, so I try to look at, why something was made by the artist, what is his position or gender. So, it is really political as well. It is also the, personality behind a piece of art that makes it interesting.” (Iris, 24, Artist)

The relationship to art has clear emotional and personal linkages that are closely connected to own past experiences that shaped their identity:

“Yes, of course. I think it has a lot to do with, personal experience as well. The way you perceive the arts. When watching a movie and I can relate it to my own life, I can feel even more and I can value the work itself even more because I can relate to it. Of course, it has a big importance, your own

experiences and your own past and how you are.” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist).

Hereby, the connection of art and identity further became evident as most interviewees expressed having art at home means recreating an aesthetic experience that is highly connected to one’s identity since they associate their home as personal space. Therefore, integrating art into the aesthetic experience at home illustrates individual tastes and emotive linkages related to identity. Giulia expressed: “I think having art at home shows your personality and your own identity. You can really see who lives in the house and how that person identifies with art.” (Giulia, 25, Student in Corporate Communication). Consequently, the creation of an aesthetic experience at home, and the perception of the aesthetic experience via the digital space (Instagram), is highly linked to personal emotions and past experiences of the individual and related to their identity.

In summary the analysis within this sub- theme shows that art as extension of the digital self is linked to emotions and past experiences that shape the perception of art and the identification with art.

4.2.2 The creation and curation of digital identities

As already the sampling criteria indicated, this research focuses on individuals that are active on social media (particularly on Instagram), therefore all participants possess a personal profile on the platform (one interviewee, Nina, obtains two separate profiles on Instagram) and are regularly participating within the platform. All of the interviewees were growing up with social media with an average starting age from 12 to 15, hence the creation of digital identities already took place at a rather young age. This reflects research by Toscano (2017), displaying that on significant feature of the 21st century is that the personal identity is present digitally as well as physically. Everyone in this study felt like, their personal profile on Instagram was a reflection of their own identity:

“I don’t have this completely aesthetic feed of like white light. I don't have that. My Instagram is messy, it is weird at times, but I love it. It's actually representing me as a person pretty well I'd say.” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

Few participants stated, that their profile does not completely reflect their personality but rather only parts of it. This was mainly expressed by the interviewees with art historical background (Sina & Feline) as Sina said: “Not completely my personality, but ‘it’s definitely telling something about myself, who I am and what my interests are in life” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist). This illustrates the notion regarding the interviewees with art historical background of being more critical towards the exhibition of art online referring to themselves and art in general on social media platforms, while they are nevertheless active on the platform:

“I just, in that sense, I’m a bit more old fashioned, I guess. I’m not as interested in digital art or like looking at it digitally as much. But that doesn’t mean that I don’t do it. I still look at it. On my Instagram, I have a thousand of accounts and artists that I follow and look at their work.” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist).

Consequently, it can be interpreted that individuals with an art historical background are more extensively influenced by their profound art historical knowledge and thus regard the illustration of the digital identity in relation to art more critical than the other interviewees of this study (this study however does not propose they are not, or less displaying themselves online and in relation to art). This argument therefore reveals the individual influence of past experiences, knowledge or external interests, that to some extent, shape identity and the perception of art by the art connoisseur as compared to the art amateur (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013; Bourdieu, 1984).

Nevertheless, all of the interviewees expressed, that their personal profile on Instagram is related to own experiences, memories and a collection of moments throughout life that become represented via the Instagram profile. Consequently, the main reasons for posting images or stories on the platform was to share moments with friends and family or to show others personal interests, recommendations or to support a specific cause online. It was particularly mentioned, that sharing exhibitions, galleries or art online was done to inspire and influence others, to recommend it or to fulfil self-documental purposes, which is in line with previous research by Budge and Burness (2018).

“And I do like to post images to challenge people, to see those things that they would maybe normally during that everyday life wouldn’t look at, you know? And I want to share that, I do posts of myself as well but less, but I do it as well. I do like to take selfies and take pictures of myself as well. Cause it’s self-

documenting, I think it's necessary. It's important. I do want to look back and have pictures of myself. It can take you to a very specific moment as well. (...) And I guess it's just, I want to share whatever I thought was like, worth looking at it one more time, basically.” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist)

The desire of the millennial art enthusiast to represent the self in relation to art is an important outcome of this study (Giannini & Bowen, 2019; Soerjoatmodjo, 2016) and illustrates connections to the uses and gratification theory (Huang & Su, 2018), as Instagram functions on likes, social acceptance and social approval regarding the representation of the digital self:

“I believe people are going to become more self-centered and not selfish, but more self-centered. Selfies on Instagram, TIK TOKS, everything right now. People want to show off who they are, what they are. I think the whole world is just gonna go into this whole selfie mode and everybody wants to feel validation from other people.” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

The digital self thus serves as instant portrayal of identity online and is communicated to the online audience. All of the interviewees regarded the linkage of art and fashion as individual self-expression that becomes evident via the digital image and illustrates personal interests.

“100%. I mean I think everything from your environment to the activities you make online to the things you look at, the things you like doing, the things you wear, everything takes some role into constructing your identity. And I think on the other way around you can also express your identity by choosing certain things you're going to wear, posting certain pictures on your profile. I think it goes one way and the other way. Like they both influence each other. Like external things influence your identity, but your identity also influences external things.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

Instagram is hence used to express identity. The concept of identity is influenced by external factors (interests, society, hobbies etc.) and the personal identity is able to have influence in the perception of external factors. Furthermore, the illustration of interests of a specific individual (e.g. via wearable art) shapes the perception others have about this specific individual:

“I mean, it also really has to do, if you're able to wear a piece of art, it's very kind of individualistic and you were able to really show your personal style with it. So I think it's, this wish to be perceived as very stylish and very, aware of the arts, so being kind of an intellectual.” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

Therefore, the interviewees states that external factors (such as clothes) can imply specific interests or properties an individual has and demonstrate belonging to a specific taste regime. In particular the collaboration between the VanGogh Museum in Amsterdam and the streetwear brand Daily Paper was seen as display of identity, by belonging to a niche group of society and making this belonging publicly visible through wearable art. Some of the participants clearly stated that the expression of interest in art through fashion creates a specific image of that person, reflecting their identity. One of the interviewees hereby, explicitly mentioned the effects of art as extension of the self.

“If I would see someone and they're wearing this collection, I would, think of them as more highly. I would like prejudge them in a positive way. I would think they are more intellectual and that they enjoy going to museums, that they enjoy looking at art. So, they're like more of an artsy person, and maybe a bit more interested in cultural aspects. I wouldn't necessarily relate it to the brand.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

This argumentation displays that the individual on Instagram transfers specific attributes onto a person. The representation of taste via Instagram is closely linked to the personal identity and creates a feeling of closeness perceived by the audience towards the digital identity they observe online. As Paula expressed: “So, they lived their experiences through those digital pictures, clothes and stuff. And it was something so relatable, so interesting. And on the other hand, it was something so relatable like heartbreak” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager). Consequently, the illustration of taste by individuals on Instagram via the digital image creates relatable content for the observer. This further resonates with the creation of taste regimens (Leban et al., 2020) that are linked to staged abstractions of identity and the according lifestyle (Goffman, 1959). Paula further states: “Of course. Which is actually one of the reasons that parents don't want children on Instagram or Tick Tock, because obviously those profiles promote a certain kind of lifestyle. So

definitely certain lifestyles are associated with that” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager). Lia as well emphasized on the display of art as lifestyle: I do consider art as my lifestyle. And a curated feed on Instagram can represent this, it’s like a piece of art.” (Lia, 24, Student in Communication and Working in PR). The display of lifestyle and taste is related to a perceived increase in the curation of the online persona, as perceived by the majority of the interviewees in this study (Leban et al., 2020):

“I have quite a lot of friends who put so much effort into their online profiles and use the same filter and the same lighting and the same colors to make their Instagram profiles look aesthetically pleasing or worthy or artsy. I think it’s just really becoming part of our lives now, if you look at some Instagram profiles, I would actually call that art because everything is so well put together. It’s just like, a collective of images, which creates a bigger piece, which I also think is art. It’s like modern art.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

As already suggested by previous research, individuals increasingly spend time and attention on Instagram and many only post pictures after intense selection process based on the expectation of receiving most likes and approval from other members on Instagram as possible (Huang & Su, 2018). The increase in the curation of the digital identity thus reflects a logic consequence of the amalgamation of the online and offline world, (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Some of the participants clearly stated, that they share specific images to create a positive and desired image of themselves (Goffman, 1959):

“I mean, just like everyone else, when I look good, I want to post it and sometimes it bothers me that the picture I look good in is not artistic enough. I do not like people that try hard to make it artistic because I think it should come just like that. It should come from an identity. So, it does bother me sometimes that I look good in a picture that is super commercial like me with a drink, you know. But I do post it because I think I look good or because I think I look skinny and that’s just the perception of the self that we talked about that everyone just wants people to perceive them that way.” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

Some of participants in this study therefore revealed, that they are purposely constructing their persona online in order to create a desired self, art hereby can thus serve as extension of the self to illustrate personality via a taste regime. All of the

interviewees mentioned, that the creation of a persona online can be achieved more easily.

“I think it’s very easy to curate your feed in a way that highlights certain aspects of yourself, or even creates a certain impression. So, a specific lifestyle you want to show that you might not even have in real life.” (Amina, 26, Working in Risk Management)

Hereby, the connection to theories of Goffman (1959) became apparent, as it can be interpreted, that individuals indeed create their online identity according to a theatrical performance, in which they perform an imaginary role of himself/herself. As Nina has two Instagram accounts she reflected: “So, it’s actually really funny to think how I’m the same person and I’m controlling those two accounts. But I have two completely different identities on both those accounts” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication). Furthermore, this particular statement underlines previous research by Kang and Wei (2018), in which the sometimes contradicting front- and back-stage of one identity possessing two different accounts on Instagram is explained. Instagram can thus serve as platform to perform multiple identities through the images they present online (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016).

In summary the analysis within this sub- theme shows that the representation of attributes of the millennial art enthusiast and the according taste regime facilitates the curation of their digital identity.

4.2.3 The persistence of elite dominance and perceived hypocrisy

One significant outcome of this study was the resulting elite dominance perceived by all of the interviewees regarding the status of art in society. Although, the participants expressed to perceive a diversification of taste, accessibility of art and its commercialization, the general results revealed a remaining elite and high-cultural categorization of art. Hereby, almost all of the interviewees stated that the museum and exhibitions are still often stereotypically associated with intelligence and culture. Luisa hereby explained: “I think so. And I think because art is still, and especially going to the museum in your free time, is still very much associated with you being, intelligent or cultured. I’m being an interesting person and being intellectual” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development). Another interviewee clearly expressed that posting pictures of herself on Instagram in relation to art makes her feel intelligent, cultural and elite:

“So, I feel like when I post those kinds of pictures in a museum or related to art, I feel as if, I'm that kind of person that is intellectual and like cultural and elite. So, it makes me feel good about myself, I guess.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

Therefore, it became evident that the associations of art still exhibit dominant characteristics of intelligence, culture, exclusivity, luxurious or elite and are generally positively perceived by the participants of this study:

“The people who've come to museums like going to a museum is kind of like a day out. So, people dress up and people like put effort into looking nice when going to a museum. So, I think that makes the whole experience kind of like luxurious in some way or like more fashionable or more like high end.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

This association of art to attributes of high culture is thus apparent in this study is in line with previous research investigating the spillover effect of art infusion (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). As outlined by Hagtvedt & Patrick (2008), the crucial properties of art are transferred onto the product and the presence of art was found to provoke associations of luxury and exclusivity. In this present study the findings suggest, that the properties of art are further transferred not only to products but also to the identity of the individual. These facts outline the desire of individuals to exhibit a specific image by possessing attributes ascribed to art (Goffman, 1959), thus the performance individuals create online according to specific consumption patterns or a specific lifestyle shows their taste regime and helps that individual to create a portrayal of a desired personality (Leban et al., 2020). Art and its properties thus become an extension of the self and illustrates identity:

“I think that probably the people think that I'm interesting, that my interests are interesting. Because art is always kind of connected to intellectual, interesting and educated human beings, even if that's not what it might be in reality, especially today because it's so accessible, which is good for me. So, it shouldn't be, so very high up there. I think if I post something like that, it's to make people think of me as having very cool interests.” (Luisa, 23, Student in Health Development)

This argument illustrates, the overall notion that all interviewees wanted their own identity to be associated with the attributes linked to art. However, when being asked

about how they instantly think about influencers/individuals promoting art online (especially influencers/individuals normally not being characterized as art interested), all of the participants expressed that they try to portray themselves as intelligent, sophisticated, cultured or cool:

“Well, it depends on the picture because, I have a picture of me in a gallery. Ah, very interesting question because I would instantly think, if someone is posing in front of a painting, I'd be like really? Like is that the one that you liked the most? Is it because you look good? Like those would be my first questions. I think she wants to portray that she likes art and she's educated for some reason. I do think people who are interested in art, I perceive them as intelligent people, people who have their own interests, who have their knowledge about the things that they're interested in, like their passions.”

(Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

This fact was related to feelings of inauthenticity regarding the observed individual. The interviewees therefore stated that this perceived hypocrisy feels annoying, not credible, hypocritical and fake for them. As Feline explained: “It’s annoying, because some people just want to show off. And want to make others think they are super interested in art” (Feline, 25, Student in Art History). Consequently, Instagram serves as platform to illustrate taste and has allowed exclusive taste to become more accessible to individuals from various economic backgrounds (Johnston et al., 2019). Therefore, Instagram shows common people how and what elites consume on their feeds (Johnston et al., 2019). As the findings of this study suggest, individuals desire to belong to a specific social class connected to high-cultural status, which is achieved by the illustration of art as part of a particular taste regimes (Leban et al., 2020). This trend hereby signifies the approximation of taste on Instagram. All of the interviewees thus felt as if individuals (that would naturally not be characterized as art enthusiasts by the millennial art enthusiast of this study) increasingly want to be perceived as belonging to the circle of art enthusiasts and further want their identity to be associated with the properties of art:

“I guess being artsy is like cool or whatever, which I think it's really far from being cool, for people who are maybe not really into art. But for people who have not a lot information about art, it can seem like that. Cause it's a creative field and has a high-status in society. So, I guess it's just that like just showing,

I have interests in it and where they think it's more appealing“ (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist)

As almost all of the interviewees felt like pictures with individuals and art-related content on Instagram generally increased, as depicted by Dania: “I follow some influencers, they always share when they go to a museum” (Dania, 25, Student in Culture & Economics). When being asked why, the interviewees responded that they think it corresponds on the one hand to achieve an aesthetically pleasing feed on Instagram and immersing the own identity into the artsy scenery:

“Quite often actually (seeing pictures of people in relation to art on Instagram). And I think it's definitely those, influencers who are into the fashion world. One reason I know is because creating Instagram content in museums is just a very good way, because the scenery is already aesthetically pleasing and good for visuals. I guess that's also a reason why a lot of influencers go to museums cause those are just the perfect places to get nice pictures of yourself. I think that has definitely increased. I just think art really, it matches so well with fashion. So, a lot of fashion influencers or even makeup influencers who want to literally match their clothing with an art piece or making it more visually pleasing or exciting, express it in a combination with like art.” (Nina, 21, Student in Media & Communication)

On the other hand, it reflects the commercialization of art. Therefore, most of the participants expressed that influencers portraying themselves in relation to art are mainly perceived as if they only want to promote themselves:

“Honestly, for people who do stuff like that, who like to pose in front of a painting without even knowing who the artist is or whatever, I don't think it's a lot about the art. So, it doesn't really matter in those cases, cause it's mainly to promote other things.” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist).

This is significant as it relates to the share of voice influencers have gained on social media and their promotion of products, institutions or brands and its effects on art consumption and image (Hausmann, 2012; Silva et al., 2019). As the general notion of increased promotion on Instagram of art related content by influencers was confirmed via the interviews, it is important to consider the possible difficulty for museums, art e-commerce platforms or galleries to choose the adequate endorser for them as the perceptions of the promotion of art can be dramatically different regarding its authenticity displayed by the endorser and the context of the illustrated

identity online. Although, current research by Leban, Thomsen, Wallpach and Voyer (2020) outlines, the capability of identities to create narratives and linked taste regimens online, it remains a question of authenticity for the interviewees of this particular study, especially in relation to art. Therefore, the boundary of who is perceived online as authentic art enthusiast, is relatively limited according to the perceptions of to the millennial art enthusiast.

“But if I think of an influencer posting this, most of the time I think it's more commercial and fake, especially people with a big following do this. But I think people that go once in 20 years, and then put it all over social media, saying I went to a museum, look at this. You would think that they're trying to look more educated than they are. Which doesn't mean that they're not. I don't understand why some people feel they need to portray themselves being interest in art when they're not. Because I think it's very obvious when you are and when you are not.” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager)

Consequently, one controversial and notable result that emerged from the interviews was, that despite the fact that all of the interviewees rather criticized others intentionally portraying themselves in front of art or in relation to art in order to evoke a specific belonging and image, they themselves post pictures and stories of art online and strongly refer to themselves as being authentically art interested. The desire of themselves to be perceived as belonging to this circle and possessing the connected attributes is further emphasized by the attributes the interviewees want other so associate with their own profile, Paula expressed: “Oh, I would definitely want people to know that I am artistic and creative. That's definitely the image that I want to portray” (Paula, 23, Assistant Manager). These attributes significantly correlated with the attributes they criticized as hypocritical when observing profiles of others portraying themselves as art interested. Additionally, the millennial art enthusiasts that participated in this study, perceived the illustration of identity and art interests by others (especially influencers) as not corresponding to their offline persona. Whereas some of the interviewees clearly characterized themselves as only portraying images clearly connected to their real interests and persona:

“They want to show themselves and their cool character, I guess. And they're a nice life. Especially the fashion influencer that tries to show that they have a lot of potential. I also work with a lot with those people. So, a lot of them, I

don't need to be rude, but where like empty inside. I mean I experienced so many people that I used to follow. These people are interesting from the outside and then I met them and it's like, nothing, of course it's disappointing. Cause it's this way of portraying herself in a way where it doesn't correspond to the reality whatsoever, you know? So, it is disappointing if you, for people who meet them in real life, but for those who never will, I guess, they will never know the difference.” (Sina, 24, Student in Art History and Freelance Stylist).

It is however necessary to acknowledge that the appreciation and evaluation of art is related to cultural exposure to art and culture as outlined by Bourdieu (1984). As he argued, the approximation of art correlates with early exposure to specific cultural goods due to cultured families or educational systems. Hence, this categorization aligns with the results of this study, since all of the participants have been exposed to art and culture early in their childhood by their parents working or having general interest in the field, by the education system or by personal hobbies such as music or painting:

“I would say a lot. My parents love art and culture. We always went to museums and exhibitions, and at home I was always surrounded by art. As a child this was sometimes annoying Also, I went to the art high school in Italy. (Giulia, 25, Student in Corporate Communication).

Consequently, this study suggests that the perceived persistence of elite dominance in society and its associations originate from traditional exposure to- and education of art and culture the participants experienced since childhood. The traditional and stereotypical attributes and connotations thus remain as persistent concept in society and is passed on across generations.

In summary the analysis within this sub- theme shows that art as an extension of the digital self is utilized in order to illustrate an image of persistent elite in general, while this portrayal is being associated with hypocrisy, when others illustrate themselves inauthentically on Instagram.

5. Conclusion

This study illustrates the perception of millennials regarding art in the 21st century and its implications for linked industries and individuals in a highly digitalized society. In particular, it investigates how millennials that portray themselves as art enthusiasts via Instagram, perceive visual art today and how they construct their identity on Instagram. As a result of this research two main themes (with each three subthemes) are identified. Within the first theme, this research elucidates that digitalization shapes the art experience of the millennial art enthusiast on Instagram as (1) the accessibility of art on social media leads to increased popularity and perceived omnipresence, (2) digital distraction and fast consumption of art on social media limit the experience of art, and finally (3) the digital transformation of society promotes diversification of taste and the commercialization of art.

One of the main findings revealed by this study is that the accessibility of art on social media increases the popularity and perception of art online as omnipresent. The interviewees perceived an increase of art in recent years and expressed a subconscious consumption of art on social media due to its omnipresence (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Consequently, this influenced their relationship to art. The availability of more information and better accessibility on social media is linked to feeling more connected to art. This finding indicates the development of the amateur art enthusiast due to a bottom-up hype of art via platforms such as Instagram that display a counterpart to elite experts previously dominating the art field (Arora & Vermeylen, 2013). The study further shows, that the millennial art enthusiast expects art content to be instantly available online (Rani, 2014; Arora & Vermeylen, 2013; Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Moreover, museums, galleries or art institutions need to digitize as well as build online presences to remain relevant in modern society. Nevertheless, the majority of the interviewees perceived the excessive content online as somewhat overwhelming. The perceived increase of art promotion on social media creates popularity and viral effects of art online that attracts younger and more diverse audiences (Hausmann, 2012; Silva et al., 2019). In this connection, most of the participants in this study expressed that the accessibility of art today makes it easier to get involved with art. Therefore, they perceive art on social media as increasingly popular due to its accessibility and omnipresence. This also supports other academic findings in regard to positive trend towards art e-commerce ascribable to facilitated accessibility of art online (Rani, 2014; Reyburn, 2019).

A further outcome of this study is that digital distractions and fast consumption patterns on Instagram limit the experience of art online. Although, the interviewees attested blurring lines between the offline and online art experience resulting from digitalization (Giannini & Bowen, 2019), there exists a clear differentiation of both elements. The feelings of the online art experience are perceived as limited and less intense, as compared to the offline experience. Therefore, the overall esthetic experience is negatively affected when perceived online. The perception of art offline is defined as special experience, and more valued by the interviewees. They all expressed, that the curation of the physical space can have major impacts on the perception of an art piece, which therefore cannot be appropriately displayed online. Art consumed via social media is rather characterized as pure entertainment and referred to as inspirational source. This perception of art online is bound to digital distractions, a limited attention span and fast consumption of visual images that occur in a short-lived and spontaneous online environment (Prior, 2005). Whereas the interviewees expressed to spend more time and attention on art when experienced in a physical space. Consequently, individuals perceive and value art more intensely when being immersed in the experience of art as activity with increased involvement (Markovic, 2011).

Crucially, this research shows that the transformation of society promotes diversification of taste and the commercialization of art. All of the interviewees expressed, that the evolution of art correlates with the evolution of society (Laszlo, 2015; Komorowski 2016; Hodgson, 2000). As a result, art mirrors a particular zeitgeist and reflects society. Technological advancements, such as social media platforms, thus provoked shifts in society with linked effects on the art world and the consumption of cultural goods (Van Rees et al., 1999). Due to the diversification of society, art corresponds to new diverse taste and preferences (Van Rees et al., 1999). As the selfie plays a crucial role within our current generation (Soerjoatmodjo, 2016), the emergence of the Selfie Museum constitutes a positive solution in order to attract younger and more diverse audiences as perceived by the interviewees. Moreover, the linkage of fashion and art is evaluated as modern way of illustrating art that contributes to its popularization (Hausmann, 2012) in mainstream culture. The democratization of taste and the development of new aesthetics of diversity on platforms such as Instagram enables individuals to consume content ranging from low-to high culture instantly (Johnston et al., 2019) that thus highlights the dissolution

of higher culture online (Prior, 2005) and the shift towards omnivorousness appreciation (Peterson & Kern, 1999). Consequently, the interviewees perceived art as increasingly commercialized and exposed via taste regimes that display a specific culture of consumption (Leban et al., 2020). The perceived diversification of taste, new access to art online and the commercialization of art into mainstream consciousness via fast moving media images contradict Bourdieu's class-limited comprehension of taste and cultural consumption. The millennial art enthusiast embodies a contemporary art connoisseur who is accessing and distributing knowledge, interest and taste of art via Instagram.

Within the second theme, this study further outlines that art is perceived as an extension of the digital self by (1) individual linkages between emotions and art, (2) representing attributes of the millennial art enthusiasts' taste regimes and thereby facilitates the curation of their digital identities, and (3) illustrating an image of persistent elite in general, while being associated with hypocrisy, when others portray themselves inauthentically on Instagram.

This study illustrates that individual linkages of emotions and art demonstrate art as extension of the digital self. All of the interviewees explained that art and the aesthetic experience is highly individual and related to the evocation of emotions and individual past experiences. Furthermore, the context of the artist plays a crucial role according to the interviewees in this study, thus the perception and evaluation of art is bound to emotional processes (Markovic, 2012). As the content on Instagram profiles displays aesthetically pleasing visuals for the participants in this research, they characterized these profiles as positive and inspirational, thus unveiling the brain's reward system when being involved in an aesthetic experience (Pearce et al., 2016). Individuals relate to the observed digital aesthetics they consume on a daily basis, by associating emotions or moods to them that express aspects of their identity. The perception of aesthetic content via the digital space (on Instagram) and the creation of an aesthetic experience at home is likewise linked to personal emotions and past experiences of the individual that relate to their identity.

One of the main findings revealed in this research is that art is perceived as extension of the digital self by representing attributes of the millennial art enthusiasts' taste regime that thereby facilitates the curation of their digital identity. One significant feature of the 21st century is that the personal identity is presented digitally as well as physically (Toscano, 2017). Therefore, all of the interviewees stated that

their personal profile on Instagram reflects their identity. However, the participants with art historical background were more critical towards the digital representation of the self and art, suggesting that they are more influenced by their profound art historical background. The argument thus reveals that individual influence of past experience or knowledge shape identity and (to some extent) the perception of art by the art connoisseur as compared to the art amateur (Arora & Vermeulen, 2013; Bourdieu, 1984). All of the interviewees expressed that their personal profile on Instagram is related to own experiences, memories and a collection of moments. Therefore, they mainly share exhibitions, galleries or art online in order to influence and inspire others, to recommend it or to fulfil self-documental purposes (Budge & Burness, 2018). The desire of the millennial art enthusiast to represent the self in relation to art is an important outcome of this study (Giannini & Bowen, 2019; Soerjoatmodjo, 2016) and shows connections to the uses and gratification theory, as Instagram functions on social approval and acceptance (Huang & Su, 2018). Hereby, the digital self serves as instant portrayal of identity. In particular, the linkage of fashion and art is regarded as individual self-expression that shows belonging to a specific taste regime (Leban et al., 2020) and its associated properties. Consequently, the individual on Instagram transfers specific attributes onto a person (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008) that creates taste regimes that are linked to staged abstractions of identity (Goffman, 1959). Some of the interviewees thereby clearly stated that they share specific images online to create a positive and desired image of themselves, via illustrating taste (Goffman, 1959).

Finally, this study showed the persistent elite dominance regarding the status of art in society and its associated attributes. Therefore, a remaining elite and high-cultural categorization of art was revealed, regardless of the diversification of taste, the accessibility of art online and its commercialization. Consequently, the dominant associations of art included attributes such as cultured, intelligent, exclusivity, luxury, sophisticated or elite, as perceived by the interviewees. This outcome suggests the spillover effect of art infusion (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008) can be transferred to the individual identity as revealed by this study. All of the interviewees desired the attributes connected to art and purposely tried to portray the according taste regime via their digital identity (Leban et al., 2020). Art and its properties thus become an extension of the digital self. However, the portrayal of other individuals on Instagram not perceived as authentically art interested, was perceived as fake, hypocritical and

annoying by the interviewees. They explicitly mentioned that some other individuals create this image of themselves to falsely belong to the circle of the millennial art enthusiast and in order to become associated with the elite properties of art. The findings of this research thus illustrate that Instagram shows common people how and what elites consume on their feeds and further suggests, that individuals desire to belong to a specific social class connected to high-cultural status (Johnston et al., 2019) by displaying the according taste regime (Leban et al., 2020). This trend hereby signifies the approximation of taste on Instagram. Although, it is possible for individuals to create narratives online that portray the millennial art enthusiasts' taste regime, it remains a question of authenticity for the interviewees in this study. This serves as important information for museum or art institutions and their marketing strategies online, as the boundary of who is perceived online as authentic art enthusiast, is relatively limited according to the perceptions of to the millennial art enthusiast. One controversial and notable result of this study regards the criticism of the interviewees when observing other individuals intentionally portraying them in relation to art while referring to themselves as authentically art interested when portraying themselves online. Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that the appreciation and evaluation of art of the interviewees in this study, is indeed linked to early exposure to art and culture, due to cultured families or education (Bourdieu, 1984). Consequently, this study suggests that persistent elite dominance and its attributes of art in society originate from traditional exposure to- and education of art the participants experienced since childhood. The traditional and stereotypical attributes and connotations thus remain as persistent concept in society and is passed on across generations. In conclusion, the findings reveal two opposing but parallel phenomena of individuals' art perception in a digitalized society: The diversification of taste versus the approximation of taste on Instagram.

This study was structured according to a qualitative and exploratory research. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted which followed a general topic guide. The interviewees were selected according to the relevant sampling criteria for this research and included international millennials in the age range from 21 to 26. Apart from the sampling criteria, the sample is diverse as it includes different personalities from various origins, living in different cities and having different occupations as well as art related backgrounds. This sample thus allowed for a multidimensional analysis which resulted in coherent findings.

Since qualitative research investigates on highly emotional levels and individual reflection on certain topics it needs to be necessarily mentioned, that this mode of research is generally dependent on its researcher and can influence the process due to the researcher's individual guidance and predisposition on specific topics (Gubrium, 2012). Furthermore, it would be interesting to consider gender differences in future studies that possibly will be conducted at a larger scale. In this present study, only females have been interviewed, however the importance of gender related consequences for the study's outcome could be taken into account. This is a crucial aspect, since gender is able to affect the interview conditions and its context, as Broom, Hand and Tovey (2009) states "Essentially, like other aspects of social life, data collection involves enactment of particular social categories (including femininity and masculinity), and awareness of the impact of these enactments is critical for interpreting qualitative data" (p.52). Future research could elaborate more extensively on the differences of art perception of individuals with art historical background as compared to the art amateur and more profoundly categorize the role of the millennial art enthusiast within the art market and its future outlook.

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APPENDIX

A: Overview of the interviewees of this study

NAME*	AGE	NATIONALITY	COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE	OCCUPATION
Amina	26	German	Mannheim, GER	Working: Risk management
Nina	21	Dutch	Rotterdam, NL	Student: communication studies
Feline	25	German	Frankfurt, NL	Student: art history
Lia	24	Slovenian	Ljubljana, SVN	Student: communication studies/ Working: PR agency
Paula	23	Ukrainian	Düsseldorf, GER	Working: assistant marketing manager (fashion)
Sina	24	Turkish	Paris, FRA	Student: art history/ Working: stylist
Iris	24	Dutch	Rotterdam, NL	Working: artist
Giulia	25	Italian	Lisbon, PRT	Student: corporate communication
Dania	25	German	Frankfurt, GER	Student: culture & economics
Luisa	23	German	London, GBR	Student: health development studies

*The names in this study have been changed in order to protect the respondents' anonymity

**All of the interviewees are female

B: Topic guide

1. Introductory questions:

- Could you describe what art means to you?
- How would you describe an aesthetic experience?
- In what sense may art be connected to an aesthetic experience for you personally?
- How often do you think you consume art on a weekly basis and how?
- How often do you visit a museum/ exhibition/ gallery in the course of 6 months?
- As of the current Corona Crisis, many museums try to offer online tours of exhibitions, have you participated in one of them recently? What do you think about this offering?
- In your past/childhood, how much have you been confronted/ in contact with art and culture?

2. Visual Art & aesthetic experience:

- What do you associate with visual art?
- If you think about the art you see in a gallery/ museum/exhibition, what kind of feelings are evoked for you?
- What kind of feelings do you connect to art you see online?
- How do you think your perception of art is influenced by the social space (e.g. the gallery)?
- In what sense do you feel like an aesthetic experience is affected by our senses? (touching art, interaction with other visitors, being in the exhibition space physically...). Can an aesthetic experience occur for you if only limited senses are involved?
- What makes art tangible for you?
- Is visual art something you feel like you can only observe or where you feel part of?
- Today, some museums offer complete exhibitions evolving around the selfie why do you think this kind of aesthetic experience emerged? Do you

think the link between online and offline realities blur increasingly? Why? Do we want art and the aesthetic experience to be part of our online realities?

- Visual art is highly connected to fashion, many artists collaborate with brands or vice versa, museums collaborate with designers. (Do you know any collaboration between art and fashion that you liked?) One very recent example is the streetwear brand Daily Paper that collaborated with the Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam and has dropped a limited clothing line with the prints of Van Gogh on hoodies or t-shirts. Do you perceive this merge as a modern way of art? Do you think art has transformed over the past decades?

3. Digitalization:

- Did you grow up with social media?
- From a scale of 0%-100% of much is social media incorporated in your everyday life?
- How do you inform yourself about current exhibitions, artists or art news in general online?
- Do you buy art online as well? What is your favorite e-commerce platform to buy art online?
- How do you feel about owning art and having it at home? (creating an aesthetic exp. At home)

4. Instagram:

- Would you think of yourself as being highly involved on Instagram?
- What accounts do you follow mostly?
- How many art related accounts do you follow?
- How do you categorize if an account on Instagram is related to art?
- Via Instagram you can search for specific terms like lifestyle, architecture, food or travel. With what other topics do you think visual art correlates the most?

- Do you feel like the presence of art online increased in recent years and if so why?
- Do you think your relationship to art has changed since it became more omnipresent online? Did art become more tangible for you?
- How often do you think you see art/ art e-commerce platforms/ galleries promoted by Influencers? (Desenio)
- For what reasons do you post pictures on Instagram? For what reason do you post stories? Are your posts mainly about you? How would you describe your Instagram account if you look at all the pictures you posted? (recreating aesthetic experience via your own profile)
- Do you feel like a personal profile on Instagram can recreate an aesthetic experience in itself? Do you feel like you want to have an aesthetically pleasing Feed? Can this be achieved by integrating art to it?
- If you see influencers, or other personal accounts on Instagram that portray themselves as art interested (by photographing themselves in the museum, gallery, or painting...) what do you instantly think about them?

5. Identity construction:

- How would you describe yourself in 3 words?
- How would you define identity in your own words?
- How many external things influence your identity?
- In what sense is your identity linked to your interests?
- How do you feel you identify with the art you see?
- Spontaneously express one word that you connect to art, which word comes to your mind?
- If thinking about the collaboration of Daily Paper x Van Gogh Museum, buying a piece of the limited clothing line, why do you think individuals are interested in wearing it? Is it rather connected to the art, to the brand or to the fact of being limited? Do you think individuals want to create an image about themselves wearing it? What image?
- Do you feel like your pictures on Instagram reflect yourself?

- When posting a picture or story of yourself in a museum, or being in a museum/exhibition or doing something art related, how do you feel about posting it? What image of yourself do you want to construct? Do you only post pictures of art online that you personally like or doesn't it really matter that much and it is more about the art in general you want to share?
- Would you say your online persona differs from your offline persona?
- Do you feel like, you can more easily construct/build your personal self-online? How much is yourself image connected to the opinions of friends? How much is it connected to the opinion of strangers?
- Naming one attribute that you would like others to associate with you when seeing your Instagram profile, which attribute would it be?

6. Closing questions:

- What is your current age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your nationality?
- What is your current place of residence?
- What is your current occupation?
- What is your highest educational level at the moment?