

Online art for everybody's sake

How emerging visual artists market their personal brand on social media

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Master's Thesis
June 2020

Abstract

In a time where social media platforms dominate communication and self-expression, it is once more essential to stand out in the sea of entertainment. Hence companies and individuals alike started to engage in personal branding and relationship marketing, two of many marketing tools, to keep their heads above water. These trends have not surpassed the occupational sector of visual artists as their career progression is nowadays also reliant upon their social media marketing behaviour. It is important to note that online channels like Facebook or Instagram tore down former institutional walls between artists and society. These obstacles have been carefully constituted over centuries by established organisations like museums and visual art galleries. Those still regulate the tensions between supply and demand.

However, the easy accessibility of artworks via phone or computer screens is not only profitable for already established artistic household names like Ai Wei Wei or Banksy but even more for emerging visual artists. By sharing their pieces directly with a dispersed audience, upcoming artists can circumvent the traditional gatekeeping role of the previously mentioned museums and art galleries. Distinct brand identities thereby support consistent and clear online communication, thus aiding at gaining a foothold not only in the social media sphere but also within the artistic world.

The research's findings especially show that any entrepreneurial task, like communication, sales, or network expansion, can efficiently be executed within an online framework. Although an emerging visual artist's artistic integrity might constrain performance centred ambitions on social media, it simultaneously correctly endorses self-promotion activities. In the course of the analysis it became evident that especially Instagram supports the communication of emerging visual artists' brand identities. The platform provides numerous affordances suitable for the profession.

The supporting data is collected through the qualitative method of expert interviews. Thereby first-hand insights into the social media marketing behaviour of emerging visual artists are gained. In the means of analysing the different social media approaches of emerging visual artists, the study contributes to the current academic research in the field of visual art.

KEYWORDS: emerging visual artist, social media, brand identity, artistic identity, relationship marketing

Acknowledgments

Writing my master thesis turned out to be an emotional rollercoaster which included many ups and downs along the ride. Therefore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has been a part of it and helped, guided or, calmed me throughout each step. First of all, this includes all study participants without whom I would not have been able to execute the topic of my choice. Also, having the chance to speak to so many admirable emerging visual artists was a unique experience. Most importantly, I would like to thank my supervisor Matthijs Leendertse who has not only supported me during the process but also gave me the possibility to research a subject close to my heart, for which I am very thankful. Finally, I want to mention all my friends and family who encouraged and calmed me in this time of joyful stress. I am very grateful for your efforts.

THANK YOU!

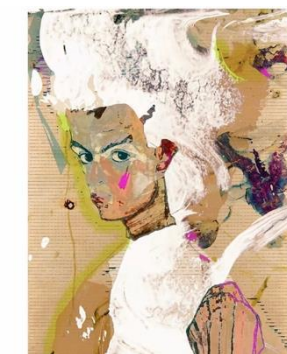
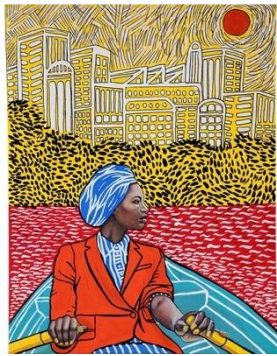


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1. Introduction

Visual art has existed throughout humankind's evolution, with what started as painted walls in caves (Cherry, 2004); and was later presented on canvases in great exhibition halls, is nowadays even found on our private screens (Trueman, 2014). Thereby the love for paintings has not only transcended centuries but also changed its form of display. Nowadays, cultural institutions like museums and galleries are the leading allocators of different artworks and promote artistic exposure (Cherry, 2004).

These cultural institutions have the obligation to generate access to exhibitions and serve as an informant and educator for society (Hudson, 1998). Over the years, the art sector brought about numerous famous names such as Van Gogh, Picasso, Klimt, and many more (Stenson, 2019). Whereas people all over the world are attending their exhibitions to grasp their genius, emerging artists struggle to keep their heads above water and often need to pursue different careers (Rengers, 2002; Van Riel, 2017).

Socially acknowledged cultural institutions thereby function as gatekeepers for artists into the haven of fine art (Yogev, 2010). Their exhibition choices decide who will succeed in the fragile art world and who is supposedly better suited for an alternating vocation. One can understand that this behaviour suppresses a lot of possible potentials as its exclusivity depicts one of the main commercial channels (Kurz, 2016). In other words, museums and galleries regulate the supply and demand of visual art (Yogev, 2010).

However, with the rise of Web 2.0 and its promotion of personal branding, new pathways to pursue the profession of a visual artist emerged (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014; Khedher, Personal branding phenomenon, 2014; O'Reilly, 2005). Mainly social media channels offer the possibility to make a name of oneself and present personal work to a dispersed audience (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). By building personal online brands, social media users can market themselves online (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Saboo, Kumar, & Ramani, 2016). Over the past two decades, many artists from different disciplines gained popularity by showcasing and distributing their work online:

The probably best-known example is the British indie rock band Arctic Monkeys. Before their breakthrough, the group was declined by various music labels, thus leading to the decision to distribute music directly on the internet to expand their reach (Gibson, 2005). According to *The Guardian*, the circulation of their music on social media turned into

viral marketing as fans participated by exchanging various song versions among other users promoting their favourite band (Gibson, 2005). This technique allowed the band to circumvent the necessity to work with record labels to expose their music by making use of online channels. Until today the musical group is one of the most studied and celebrated cases of artistic internet fame, serving as a flagship of self-made online success in the creative industries (Shalev, 2018).

A more recent case depicts the female poet Rupi Kaur. She, too, made use of social media by sharing her work online (Mzezewa, 2017). In an interview with *The New York Times*, the artist explained: “Instagram makes my work so accessible and I was able to build a readership.” (Mzezewa, 2017, para. 4). In fact, this vast online readership allowed Ms. Kaur to publish two books already, making her one of the current most popular female (Insta)poets (Mzezewa, 2017). Again, we can witness the power of online platforms and how individuals can seize them to promote their work and themselves (Morris, 2014).

While both previous cases addressed the artistic sectors of music and the written word, social media also brought about success in the field of visual art. In 2011 Murad Osmann started sharing travel pictures of himself and his wife on his Instagram account, attracting the attention of thousands of people. Since then, he was not only labelled one of the most influential digital stars by *Forbes Magazine* (Forbes, 2017); his work also got exhibited at Art Basel, Times Square, and is now available at the “Avant Gallery” (Avant Gallery, n.d.). The example evidences that the opportunities provided by digital technologies foster relationships between artist and fans, thus possibly generating successful exposure which surpasses the borders of online fame into the real world (Morris, 2014).

Summarising, all three cases demonstrate the power of the Web 2.0 in our society and how artists found a way around the traditional ladder to success, by emerging through social media (Gibson, 2005; Mzezewa, 2017). These technologies make cultural production – the process of making art – more accessible (Morris, 2014). Once more, it must be highlighted that all three examples did not have any previous exposure of their work before promoting themselves and their art on social media. Ultimately all case studies started gaining success by taking matters into their own hands (Gibson, 2005; Mzezewa, 2017). By marketing themselves online without intermediaries, visual artists can communicate an unfiltered picture of their work and moreover, build their own “user base” (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014).

It is now essential to understand what steps visual artists undertake to build their personal social media brand by promoting their work online (Labrecque et al., 2011). Thereby their goal might be to emerge from virtual anonymity to recognised visual art brand (Khedher, Personal branding phenomenon, 2014). To guide this research, the following question asked is:

RQ: How are emerging visual artists using social media marketing tools to promote their own work?

The research will concentrate on the changing possibilities and also expectations of visual artists in light of the fast progression of social media platforms and their concomitant tools (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014). In the course of this discussion, it is vital to introduce the concept and accompanying strategies of social media brand identities as they play an integral part in today's online communication (Shepherd, 2005). In fact, personal branding and the resultant establishment of brand identities on social media have not only affected the behaviour of companies online but also the actions of individuals (i.e.: artists). Many academics suggest that it is equally important for private users to "sell" themselves online by portraying a constituent image of themselves (Shepherd, 2005).

This trend also affects visual artists who market themselves on social media. The research will challenge existing concepts of an individual's online brand identity and relate it to the particular case of artistic identity. Taylor and Littleton (2008a) and Rostan (1998) thoroughly discussed the construction of artistic identities. In general, artistic identity can be defined as the "individual's conception of what it means to be an artist" and affects the ability to carry out related work (Rosen, 1986, p. 279).

Furthermore, identity perceptions can be connected to popular social media marketing activities, defined by, Khedher (2014) or Labrecque et al. (2011), thus investigating their application and perceived effectiveness. One, who has clearly understood the importance of branding one's identity to support commercial success is the visual artist Andy Warhol (La Ferla, 2006). Even years after his decease, he still serves as a shining image of brand culture and depicts an inspiration for companies, individuals, and artists alike. According to *The New York Times*, the artist's interests in bright colours, mass consumerism, fame, and celebrities were not only incorporated in his work but also his eccentric appearance, thereby shaping pop culture significantly (La Ferla, 2006). Fans knew of what to

expect from him while still being awed by his actions. Defining quotes like “in the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes” have carried on his legacy, marking him as one of the most popular branded visual artists (Tyrangiel, 2006). Warhol demonstrates the power of unique brand identities for artists and what can be achieved with them (La Ferla, 2006).

Even though the brand identity should stand in the centre of any promotional social media strategy (Khedher, 2014; Labrecque et al., 2011; Shepherd, 2005); one must not forget the role of the wholesome online community (O'Reilly, 2005). As explained by O'Reilly (2005) the Web 2.0 and all its applications are structured by users and for users, highlighting the importance of “harnessing collective intelligence” (section Harnessing Collective Intelligence, para. 1). The author further elaborates that this integration not only adds substantial value but also empowers users to express their opinions to challenge existing regimes, thereby shaping online platforms. Hence previously, one-sided communication, initiated by companies or platform operators, evolves into a binary conversation between organisations and consumers (O'Reilly, 2005).

Many already established famous artists embraced this concept of social media duality. They started not only to step into conversations with their fans but also integrated them into the cultural production process (Morris, 2014). Pop stars such as Britney Spears or Imogen Heap, who successfully integrated their followers in the creation of their songs, perfectly exemplify the strategic scenario. Moreover, their cases entered the field of academia, as they have been investigated by many researchers such like Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) or Morris (2014).

In terms of visual art and social media communities, many prestigious magazines like *Vogue* or the online paper *Highsnobiety* report about social media career launches and consequently, easy accessibility of artworks (Atkinson, 2016; Fleming, 2014). Both sources explain that social media is tearing down the protectionist ideology of the visual art world by engaging with audiences directly. The approachability of the artist him or herself, away from brick and mortar spaces, encourages ordinary people to contact them and build online relationships (Fleming, 2014). Given the interest and the need for a deeper understanding of how emerging visual artists not only strategize their social media activities but also execute their efforts, two further sub-questions were necessary to introduce:

SQ₁: How are emerging visual artists strategizing their social media activities to promote their own work?

SQ₂: How are emerging visual artists executing their social media performance to promote their own work on social media?

The previously introduced research question and associated sub-questions are going to guide the research process and will ultimately be answered according to the gained insights.

1.1 Academic relevance

Even though many scholars focused on personal branding via social media in the past (Labrecque et al., 2011); and point at the importance of online media tools to market creative work (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012); they merely address the special case of artists in the music industry (Salo, Lankinen, & Mäntymäki, 2013). Britney Spears, Imogen Heap, Justin Bieber or Taylor Swift are only a few of those discussed by academics to pave their research (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Morris, 2014; Saboo et al., 2016). By prioritising one specific artistic industry (i.e.: music), academia is leaping over the category of visual art.

Moreover, present research papers concentrate on already established artists at the centre of the music industry (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Morris, 2014). Nevertheless, it is equally relevant to focus on cases of novel artists in general as they lack the reputation of the offline world (Saboo et al., 2016). Consequently, it is vital to investigate visual artists' social media marketing behaviour and concomitant personal branding and relationship activities to further contribute to the ongoing debate on social media's career impact. Academia solemnly focuses on the social media behaviour of artists who already have a significant standing in their respective working fields. Meaning artistic research subjects have already acquired a certain celebrity status through their previous work and events in the real world and merely transport their fans into the virtual online world. Moreover, they can comfortably rely on existing monetary funds or additional manpower, in form of social media teams, to professionally execute their online communication.

Therefore, in order to research the true powers of social media, the focus on emerging artists depicts an academic necessity, as the field appears to be untouched by previous work. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to even the odds by integrating visual artists who do not have a massive following in the real world yet or the resources to

outsource their online communication. Only by researching their behaviour the organic powers of social media can be tested, investigated, and aid at closing the existing gap in literature.

1.2 Social relevance

Besides filling the academic void of visual artists' social media marketing activities, the research also aims at contributing to society as a whole. By analysing the behaviour of individual visual emerging artists, insights into their actions can be gained. The results aim to derive common practices and investigate all actions in great detail. This, in turn, will help others to promote their work on social media channels successfully. Furthermore, the research ought to increase the chances of effectively building a personal online brand and potentially circumvent restricting practices of the artistic world (Labrecque et al., 2011; Yogev, 2010). All in all, the study aims at empowering emerging visual artists to take matters into their own hands to bypass intermediaries.

2. Theoretical Framework

The artistic market environment and its task of cultural production are known to be uncertain (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009); many factors contribute to this economic state and affect all parties involved (Yogev, 2010). However, the rise of the Web 2.0 and its numerous online applications provided novel marketing and communication possibilities and is consequently re-shaping the artistic market landscape as it was known (Khedher, 2014; Yogev, 2010). Especially social media platforms significantly influence the mechanics of the visual art sector as every participant (i.e.: visual artist, art galleries, museums, audiences) needs to adapt their behaviour accordingly (Arora & Vermeylen, 2014). The subsequent sections are going to highlight the individual roles and their changing environment due to social networks initiating the change of online marketing efforts of emerging artists and explain them in great detail (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012).

2.1 Visual art's working environment

The performance of the cultural and creative industry has been praised by various governments to promote economic growth even in times of recession (UNESCO, 2009). Over the years, the industry's contribution has not disappointed and still stimulates economic performance in various countries of the European Union (EIT, 2019). It is currently

employing, as to 2019, more than 12.5 million Europeans and is also responsible for more than 4 percent of EU GDP. Many academics, like Cunningham and Higgs (2009) or Murray and Gollmitzer (2012), describe the cultural and creative industry as an economic enabler since they perceive many parallels to be a driving force of innovation and development.

However, these economic facts give the impression that the cultural and creative industry is a unified field with a single process. On the contrary, the term depicts a “complex and diverse set of industries competing for the same pool of disposable consumer income, time, advertising revenue and labour” (Hesmondhalgh, 2008, p. 553). According to UNESCO (2009), every sector that shares a common theme of creativity and produces goods of cultural or artistic heritage counts as a member of the cultural and creative industry. Hence the process of creating any such cultural products, also called artistic goods, is defined as *cultural production* (UNESCO, 2009).

Besides the performance sector or audio-visual sector (i.e.: Film, TV, or Radio), the industry also includes the sector of visual art (UNESCO, 2009). Although cultural and creative industries are remarkably contributing to the overall economy (UNESCO, 2009); they are still distinct from other industries (Bourdieu, 1983). The awareness about the distinction has been around for more than 40 years and was first described by Pierre Bourdieu (1983). The sociologist explains that economic science turned to be solely defined by market relationships aiming at profit maximisation. Thereby it is precluding unselfish relationships and their connected industries. This includes, to some extent, the cultural and creative industries with their cultural production of art for art’s sake (Bourdieu, 1983).

Accordingly, the academic introduces three distinct forms of which are interconnected and can change over time to render all contributors to the world economy (Bourdieu, 1983). These factors describe specific fields environment but also shape marketing activities (Khedher, 2015):

- (1) **Cultural capital** is based on the theory of ‘human capital’. It describes a person’s individual skills, knowledge or competences and is therefore *incorporated* by him or her but can also be advanced through learning or practicing over time. However, cultural capital can also be *institutionalised*, meaning by accumulating, for example, a university degree the specific capital gets institutionally acknowledged. Furthermore, cultural capital can be *objectified* as it can be

incorporated through material goods. Thereby Bourdieu (1983) names the example of paintings as an artistic product, pointing at the visual art sector.

(2) **Social capital** is the totality of interpersonal relationships and further describes the importance of social contacts (Bourdieu, 1983). Those social resources define people as a member of a specific group, which can also be extended through timely networking.

(3) **Economic capital** directly translates into monetary value. Every decision within this capital aims at maximising profits and is anything but altruistic. Further, it converts the previous two capitals into economic capital by computing its worth, which is seldom without difficulties (Bourdieu, 1983).

Based on those insights Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) argue that each capital varies in importance according to the chosen industry, but all are eventually prevailing. Hence, in the cultural and creative industry, including the visual art sector, cultural capital potentially accumulates the most benefits. Nevertheless, different forces of the market environment are still at play, indicating that a high imbalance among the capitals affects marketing performance (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007).

Furthermore, Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) discussed the powerplay between cultural and economic capital. The researchers found that an emphasis on economic capital ultimately leads to a crowding-out effect regarding cultural capital, potentially diminishing the concept of cultural production in terms of art for art's sake. While the academics' analysis focuses on the performance sector, similarities to Tamar Yogev's (2010) research on the visual art sector can be drawn. She, too, finds a certain economic dominance, which is ordered by visual art institutions and consequently limits artistic logics (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Yogev, 2010).

Another critical understanding is the relation of capital theory with marketing activities. It aims to render economic capital by communicating social and cultural capital as a brand's core message to an audience (Khedher, 2015). The subsequent sub-sections will focus on the market obstacles for emerging visual artists as well as their mandatory entrepreneurial activities.

2.1.1 The dominant role of gatekeepers

As previously mentioned, the media and creative industries are told to be somewhat of an innovative driving force of a country's economy (UNESCO, 2009). Yet, Benhamou (2013) describes the working environment of the visual art sector as fluctuating and risky. To be precise, only a handful, scarcely selected artists possess an occupation of "pure" creative work as their core practice (Throsby, 2007). The majority needs to add jobs from non-art sectors to sustain (Rengers, 2002).

This necessity of working more than one job at a time stems from the sector's oversaturation. Manifold academic programmes and conversely, the weak importance of diplomas lower entry barriers into the profession of visual art (Bain, 2005). Rosen (1986) details: "the probability of rising to the top group is so uncertain, entry into these fields has many aspects of a lottery in which only a few obtain the big prizes." (p. 681). The question arises of who is in charge of drawing the raffle of success. Historically, this role has been ascribed to cultural institutions. These filter visual artists according to their understanding, thus functioning as gatekeepers to victory (Yogev, 2010).

Moreover, Schroeder (2005) explains: "Successful artists – those that manage to have their work widely exhibited ... may be seen as ... managers of their own brand" (p. 1293). First, we can derive from this statement that artists are only considered to be successful if their work gets exhibited, thus rendering economic capital with their underlying cultural and social capital (Khedher, 2015). Second, they turn into so-called brand managers who "create visual brands via their work" (Schroeder, 2005, p. 1300).

To get their work publicly exhibited, visual artists need to pass the so-called *gatekeepers* of the visual art world (Yogev, 2010). Gatekeepers in the professional artistic field of visual art are higher instances seizing the power of evaluating the cultural, social, and economic value of creative work (Bourdieu, 1983; Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Yogev, 2010). They decide which visual artist will enjoy the public exposure of their craft and receives access to scarce resources to survive in the fragile artistic world (Yogev, 2010). Museums and galleries incorporate this monopolistic role as intermediary in the visual art sector, otherwise also summarised as cultural institutions (Hudson, 1998).

Tamar Yogev (2010) stresses various characteristics of gatekeepers' activities, such as the closely tied relationship between cultural institutions, resonating the exclusivity and unapproachability of the visual art sector through selective practices. Furthermore, the

power of those in charge to exhibit and promote, also allows them to dictate certain topics or special styles, leading to the creation of fashionable trends. Consequently, artists often must bend in any direction adapting their work, accordingly, thereby limiting creativity and ultimately sliding towards conformity and conservatism (Yogev, 2010).

Furthermore, a visual artist may be deprived of accessing galleries or museums as of their lack of social capital (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). Functioning wholesome networks in the visual art sector can be entered through a formalised relationship with art institutions by being exhibited (Yogev, 2010). Without those, it is common to be side-lined and overstepped.

However, even though the struggles of visual artists are considered universal along the hierarchical career path, they are even more applicable for newly emerging ones (Gokhan et al., 2016). What is more, with their restricting power, gatekeepers have also played an essential role in artist's marketing activities and therefore the construction of visual artists' brand identities as they mainly influenced of how art is viewed by being sole exhibitors (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015; Yogev, 2010). These theoretical concepts will be expanded on in the following chapters. Artists who decide to market themselves (online and offline alike) are often considered entrepreneurs (Fletcher, 2008). Entrepreneurial tasks include a whole new set of difficulties and opportunities, which are explained during the next section. Additionally, the definition of emerging visual artists will be discussed in great detail throughout the following chapter 2.2 Defining the emerging visual artist.

2.1.2 The artist as entrepreneur

The previously explained obstacles of the visual art market's environment demand practicing artists to become entrepreneurial not only in terms of their final work but also regarding marketing and communication activities (Win, 2014; Yogev, 2010). The creative and cultural industries, including the visual art sector, needed a new professional identity and started to define workers of the industries as *artist-entrepreneurs* (Fletcher, 2008). This occupational label describes a role "mid-way between the internal idea-focus of the artist, and the external market focus of the entrepreneur" (Fletcher, 2008, p. 145). By combining the expressional level of artistic work (internal) and the performance centred ambitions (external) of entrepreneurs, the profession can challenge incumbent market structures. Thus, by taking economic matters into their own hands, artist-entrepreneurs can circumvent

the restraining practices of cultural institutions and undertake crucial marketing activities independently (Calcagno & Balzarin, 2016; Yogev, 2010).

However, Calcagno and Balzarin (2016) found that many artist-entrepreneurs seem to struggle with the duality of their job at the start of the endeavour. They perceive their artistic quality as superior compared to their economic abilities to successfully market themselves. Although this struggle rarely truly fades, many artist-entrepreneurs enjoy the freedom as they leap over the obstacle of cultural institutions and form relationships directly with their audience (Calcagno & Balzarin, 2016).

This direct interaction brings a lot of tasks with it. Win (2014) investigates the special chores of artist-entrepreneurs in the visual art sector. The researcher finds that the relationship between visual artists and commerce is getting more explicit through the introduction of entrepreneurship in the sector (Win, 2014). Thereby, he points at many difficulties, such as the increasing expectations of professionalism. This high degree of professionalism is assumed to be a standard in the cultural and creative industries and especially visual art sector. Entrepreneurial chores include *marketing, self-promotion, communication, funding, sales, and distribution* (Win, 2014). As all of them have to be managed by just one-person, time management becomes crucial.

Furthermore, to perform these tasks with a certain degree of consistency and success, the introduction of a brand identity appears to be inevitable (Win, 2014). Schroeder (2010) explains that especially visual artists and brands have more in common than one might recognise at first sight. Visual art is based on image, value, and identity as so is the branding culture. It summarises many tasks and is a “powerful representational system that produces knowledge through discursive practice” (Schroeder, 2010, p. 20). Consequently, branding presents itself as a feasible solution for visual artist-entrepreneurs to market themselves (2.3.2 Brand Identity).

Even though art buyers are interested in the objectified cultural capital (artwork or product line), the brand itself is mediated through incorporated cultural capital (artist) and, therefore, again part of the final product (Schroeder, 2010). A painting’s net value can change according to its originator – marking the person behind the object as even more valuable and as a carrier of the brand identity (Schroeder, 2010). By conveying a consistent image, visual artists are promoting themselves as recognisable brand (Schroeder, 2005). In an online environment (detailed in chapter 2.3 Social media), an artist’s online channel and

it's accumulated posting history evidence cultural as well as social capital and its resulting attention to it (Khedher, 2015; Fallon, 2014).

Through any marketing activity, the entrepreneur must not forget Bourdieu's (1983) threefold capital theory. Besides the mentioned mandatory entrepreneurial activities and the cultural capital *incorporated* in the artist and *objectified* in the resultant goods, it is equally important to sustain and expand social capital. Networking to accumulate social contacts can multiply the communication efficiency of an artist's brand and secures future income (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014). The same counts for cultural capital as expansions in knowledge and skill signal development and seniority.

While the previous sections focused on the market environment of the creative and cultural industries, it is equally important to provide a better understanding of how artists identify themselves to understand their branding efforts truly. The focus will also lie on the concrete definition of visual artists as they are the main subject of this research. The investigation of constraints or ambitions is necessary to paint a better picture of their behaviour (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). Thereby the entrepreneurial background will be kept in mind throughout the chapters 2.2 Defining the emerging visual artist and 2.3 Social media.

2.2 Defining the emerging visual artist

The definition of *visual artist* is anything but uniform. While the term *visual* narrows it down to artworks appreciated by the eye, the word *artist* comprises various understandings (Benhamou, 2013). Many scholars stress the fact that there is no standardised description regarding the qualification criteria to call someone an artist (Karttunen, 1998; Roodhouse, 2006). However, most academics rely on the internationally recognised description of the UNESCO:

Artist' is taken to mean any person who creates or gives creative expression to, or re-creates works of art, who considers his artistic creation to be an essential part of his life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture and who is or asks to be recognized as an artist, whether or not he is bound by any relations of employment or association. (UNESCO, 1980, section Definitions, para. 1)

As briefly mentioned before, the discipline of visual art includes all works appreciated by the eye (Benhamou, 2013). Thereby the category is ranging from sculpture over paintings and photography until motion pictures (Cherry, 2004). The research will further concentrate on the visual experiences of painting and photography.

As explained in the prior section of the visual art's market environment, many obstacles spike the way of becoming an established figure in the visual art sector (Yogev, 2010). Gokhan et al. (2016) elaborate that an established visual artist's reputation and status build upon prior accomplishments, thus affecting future employment, which in turn is also based on previous exposure of an artist's work. Conversely, emerging artists are relatively unknown, compared to already established ones, as they lack significant exposure through exhibitions of their work (Gokhan et al., 2016).

There are two different categories of emerging artists. On the one hand, they might be at the beginning of their career path, striving to become a professional visual artist (Yogev, 2010). On the other hand, they could also be working in the field for years without accomplishing a significant exhibition of their previous work (Yogev, 2010). Besides the differing background, both types must have achieved exposure of their work through either an art gallery or museum in the recent past, evidencing their striving potential, thus qualifying as emerging (Gokhan et al., 2016).

The UNESCO (1980) definition of what it means to work as an artist, provides an economic understanding for people outside the artistic sector. Furthermore, it covers the aspects of the overall importance of artistic work to one's perceived artistic life, the contribution to the carried-out work to the sector of arts and culture as well as employment relations (existing or non-existing) (UNESCO, 1980). Nevertheless, it does not indicate how artists identify themselves. In relation to artistic identity, Win (2014) mentions *artistic subjectivity*, which he describes as a reflection of an artist's identity within his or her work. The academic observes in reference to his study, which concentrates on entrepreneurial tasks of visual artists. Preece and Kerrigan (2015) expand this concept by finding that especially visual artist's brand identity depicts an expansion of artistic identity as "their life becomes a part of the brand" (p. 1223). Consequently, the next sections will focus on the concepts of artistic identity as well as a brand identity.

2.2.1 Artistic identity

As suggested by Freeman (1993), an artist's identity comprises the notion of what it means to be an artist and the private conception of artistic work. This varied understanding, in turn, affects the ability to carry out work and influences the final outcome (Rostan, 1998). Moreover, it was found that an artist's individual understanding of art and creative work is determined by two different resources (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). The first one includes all *social resources*, which are further defined by expectations of artistic employment in the creative industries (as exemplified throughout chapter 2.1 Visual art's market environment) and artistic life in general. The second one concentrates on *local resources*. These entail the personal context of past life experiences. The combination of both ultimately creates artistic identity (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a).

Some academics like Bain (2005), understand that identity (and consequently social and local resources) is dominated by categorical notion thinking. The concept explains that stereotypical groups, which constructed by society (i.e.: class or gender), provide secure identities for each artistic individual and thus place them ready-made within society (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a).

However, artistic identity is anything but cast in stone. The theory of reflexive modernism extends the increasing importance of individualism (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). According to Taylor and Littleton (2008a), discussing Adkins (2002), reflexive modernism and individualisation both describe identities as continually evolving through the mental processing of own experiences. Thereby the construction of artistic identities denies structural constraints of class thinking within the cultural industries. In a relating study, the academics further detail that "contemporary life possibilities are understood in terms of individual opportunity and responsibility" (p. 21) and are influencing identity (Taylor & Littleton, 2008b).

Throughout their research, Taylor and Littleton (2008a) introduced a joint theoretical concept of categorical notion thinking and reflexive modernism to perfectly capture the complexity of artistic identities. The combination allows proposing the constant evolution of identity work while still taking societal class constructions into account (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). In other words, social and local resources of an artistic identity can change over time according to an artist's reflexivity but are also guided by social notion constructions (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a).

The following sub-sections will elaborate on social as well as local resources. Thereby both parts will emphasise on categorical notion thinking as well as on the processes of reflexive modernism and connected individualism. Only by focusing on both opposing traits, a wholesome picture of artistic identity can be established (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a).

a) Social resources

Social resources mostly draw upon connections to an artist's work in the visual art sector (Bain, 2005; Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). It entails expectations about tasks, norms, and market uncertainties. Thereby, the importance of a person's occupational label plays a central figure in any western industrial society. Henceforward it also applies to the profession of visual artists (Bain, 2005).

Although most professions benefit from clear stereotypical descriptions and a unanimous understanding throughout society (i.e.: accountant, teacher, or receptionist), the profession of a visual artist is still to some extent quite mystified (Bain, 2005). Freeman (1993) notes that creativity is "woven into the fabric of life itself" (p. 36), making the artistic art sector and its occupations somewhat of an intangible asset themselves, which cannot be grasped by everyone. One of the main contributors to this perception is confusion about the importance of previous education for visual artists (Bain, 2005; Benhamou, 2013).

Even though there are many schools and concomitant degrees or licenses to identify oneself academically as a visual artist or to bolster the claim (Benhamou, 2013); they are simultaneously no bound necessity for people to proceed the profession or to also rise to the top (Bain, 2005; Freeman, 1993). Furthermore, many ascribe artists a certain quality which cannot be determined by any degree, hence artists are more or less "singled out for their uniqueness" (Freeman, 1993, p. 37). This circumstance makes it inherently difficult to distinguish "artists from non-artists and professionals from amateurs" which points once more at the weak importance of said diplomas (Bain, 2005, p. 26).

Uncertainty about artistic quality and absence for the necessities for diplomas to evaluate artistic work, eventually fuel the mystification of the visual art's sector and thus contribute to the social repertoire – repertoire being a social overall understanding or conception – art-versus-money (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). Taylor and Littleton (2008a) describe art and money-making as opposing activities. The researchers hint once more at cultural production in the sense of art for art's sake (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). It implies that "a choice has to be made between commercial success and doing creative work"

(Taylor & Littleton, 2008a, p. 281). By adhering to styles dictated by museums and art galleries to possibly get exhibited, visual artists are bowing down to visual art institutions and are betraying their integrity (Yogev, 2010). This chain of thoughts supports the stereotype of the *struggling artist* which is entrenched in society and is, therefore, an outcome of categorical notion thinking (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a).

At the same time, the commercialisation of artistic work must not be ignored. This commercial turn in the artistic sector is rooted in the social repertoire called *money-as-validation* discussed by Taylor and Littleton (2008a). It understands that every earning, stemming from artistic work, is a direct “marker of artistic success” (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a, p. 280). In this context, the academics make use of the term *selling out* as their interviewees often referred to artists sacrificing their quality to make money (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). This belief supports the construction of yet another myth about artists, namely the so-called *decadent grandeur* otherwise also known artist-heroes who even “attract the attention of the paparazzi” (p. 38) through their rise to popularity (Freeman, 1993).

Since financial success for the visual artist does not come easy, many experience a change of heart over time as they realise the importance of a security net catching them in desperate times (Bain, 2005; Benhamou, 2013). Therefore, it is ever more important to undertake entrepreneurial tasks such as marketing oneself directly without being reliant upon others (Win, 2014). Hence the self-sufficient creation of economic capital through cultural and social capital is often a steady companion of visual artists.

b) Local resources

As illustrated in the previous section, an artist’s identity is also formed by local resources (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). Those focus entirely on personal contexts (i.e.: schooling, bygone career path, hometown or country, etc.) (Freeman, 1993). Under this perspective, Freeman (1993) strongly argues that an artist’s work is not affected by but rather constituted through personal contexts. Hence people need to experience life, gain expertise, and refine skills to be more likely to produce significant artwork (Freeman, 1993). Taylor and Littleton (2008b) add that “a unique creative career and identity is likely to take time” (p. 82). These findings connect to Bourdieu’s (1983) capital theory, who also argues that individual cultural and social capital develops over time and should build the core of any marketing activity (Khedher, 2015).

At the beginning of any artistic endeavour, positive or negative feedback influences future development significantly (Rostan, 1998). It was highlighted that especially early contact with artistic tasks sparks interest in continuing artistic schooling later on, which eventually results in an artistic career. Rostan (1998) investigated the artistic behaviour and beliefs of children in pre-schools and elementary schools during a voluntary painting class. The researcher found that children already have a stereotypical notion of what it means to be an artist. These stereotypes eventually prevail a whole life and later dictate artistic identities as well as their brand identities eventually (Freeman, 1993).

However, while one can evidence categorical notion thinking in early life stages, feedback from relatives, teachers, and peers ensures the beginners to continue their passion and education (Rostan, 1998). By inspiring people to continue their artistic work, they might understand that the formation of artistic identity is a continuous process that develops over time (Freeman, 1993). Simultaneously, artists who doubt their work early on turn out to be more cautious about their creations. Furthermore, positive community feedback of any form is relevant for artists to continue their work in terms of artistic and entrepreneurial marketing tasks alike (Freeman, 1993; Rostan, 1998).

All mentioned identity concepts contribute to how artists perceive themselves and are, therefore, seen as puppetmasters of identity construction (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). It is an interplay between societal discourses or how to influence perceptions of what it means to be an artist, communication with others, and an artist's own understanding about work in that sector (Bain, 2005; Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). Moreover, the relevance of external social discourses in relation to identity construction is visible in connection with brand identities (Khedher, 2015; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). The socio-cultural approach of brand identity creation by Preece and Kerrigan (2015) is illustrated during the following section.

2.2.2 Brand identity

While the preceding sections focused on the internal construction of artistic identity, the following paragraphs will concentrate on the public communication of an artist's identity, also known as brand identity. As described, Schroeder (2005) considers artists who are being publicly exhibited as managers of their own brand and are, therefore, taking part in personal branding activities. Khedher (2015) resumes the discussion by elaborating that

any personal branding activity, to create a public brand identity, relies heavily on social and cultural capital as a communicative source to render economic capital further.

Although the process of artistic subjectivity has already been clarified various times, it needs to be highlighted once more: The procedure explains that an artistic product (objectified cultural capital) reflects and is also tied to an artist's identity (incorporated cultural capital) (Win, 2014). Academics like Preece and Kerrigan (2015) go even further by saying, "Through creating their art, artists manage their identities" (p. 1215). Though it evidences a tight relationship between an artist and his or her final product, one must not forget that the creator behind any artistic product is still the determinator of its final monetary value (Schroeder, 2010). Hence personal branding efforts are in due to promote not only one's work but rather an identity. To be precise, artistic identity significantly shapes the personal brand identity (Schroeder, 2010; Khedher, 2014).

Many academics like Khedher (2014; 2015) or Parmentier, Fischer, and Reuber (2012) investigated marketing activities and, thus, branding behaviour by relying upon Bourdieu's capital theory. Each capital functions either as a resource of a brand identity (social and cultural capital) or serves as remuneration for branding efforts (economic capital) (Khedher, 2014); Parmentier et al. (2012) contribute to the capitals of brand identity understanding by separating it into the aspects of *fitting in* versus *standing*. The researchers explain that a successful portrayal of brand identities demands "field-specific social and cultural capital that allows them to "stand out," while acquiring the habitus that allows them to comply with field and occupation-specific expectations to "fit in." (Parmentier et al., 2012, p. 373).

At the same time, the school of thought promoting *socio-cultural approaches* in branding theory considers "brands as socially constructed and reliant on a range of actors collectively developing brand identity" (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015, p. 1209). Therefore, it advocates that brand identity holders are not in the full possession of their communicated identity. Contextually, Preece and Kerrigan (2015) discuss a collective brand identity nature in terms of visual artists, where especially an audience's evaluation gains in weight regarding a communicated artist's brand identity and its possible coherent economic success. Ultimately a brand identity reflects social and cultural capital and all "associations that a group of people identify" (p. 374) with it (Parmentier et al., 2012).

Following the twofold set of *fitting in* and *standing out* will be explained in more detail while paying special attention to outside evaluation to grasp how artists can form feasible brand identities.

a) Fitting in

Regards Bourdieu's (1990) *habitus theorem*, which in turn also connects to his previous work on capital theories (Bourdieu, 1983). The habitus concept investigates as to how each individual working field is bound to some stereotypical characteristics, working attitudes, habits, and behaviour (those are incorporated within cultural and social capital characteristics). Actors within an occupational field have a shared understanding of how their practices should be executed, and their behaviour displayed (Bourdieu, 1990). By complying to standardised values and expectations of a specific field, individual actors (in the researcher's relation visual artists) can evidence their worth of belonging; they are habituated to the field (Parmentier et al., 2012). It is understood as the ability to conform to the prevailing cultural and social capital of a specific field (Bourdieu, 1990).

In terms of collectivity, the research considers *fitting in* as presumed to comply with a particular set of standards, which are generally understood by a broader audience in relation to visual artists (Parmentier et al., 2012; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). These standards are bound to reduce uncertainty risks for evaluating audiences. Here a strong connection to the topic of social resources is evidenced.

With regard to an artist's social capital in terms of fitting in, it can be said that to some extent, specific networks are considered a necessity in the field of visual art (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). Although there are no mandatory educational steps for an artist to follow, they still allow turning outsiders into insiders as they offer access (Bain, 2005). Communicating those relations helps to display a network membership and its concomitant contextual knowledge of the artworld (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015).

To fit in cultural capital in brand identities can be understood as communicating certain stereotypical assumptions about artists. Again, the prevailing notions of the struggling artist or the decadent grandeur pop into mind (Freeman, 1993). On the one hand, many visual artists often feel "pushed into enacting certain artistic stereotypes" (p. 1217) for the sake of their brand identity and audience responsiveness (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). On the other hand, Preece and Kerrigan (2015), citing Gaertner, note that artists often happily and voluntarily adopt stereotypical narratives as certain myths are more successful

and fuel a brand identity's economic success. Chapter 2.2.1 Artistic identity already illustrated the most common stereotypes of influence for a visual artist's identity.

b) Standing out

Against its obvious connotation, *standing out* in terms of brand identity does not comprise a "unique selling proposition" (Parmentier et al., 2012, p. 384). In fact, too much uniqueness often seems odd and makes many brands stumble by trying to differentiate themselves. Instead, academics urge holders of brand identities to stand out in a valuable way. Accumulated cultural and social capital must seem of benefit and pleasant for the final audience (Parmentier et al., 2012). Greater field-specific cultural and social capital is required to increase a brand's value (Khedher, 2015).

Social capital varies across brand identities and their artistic holders. While some forms of social capital are preconditioned, many are gained over time (Khedher, 2015; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). Resulting in exceptional connections and outstanding network memberships support visual artists to rise from the masses. Contacts can not only be expanded by getting exhibited but also by being active in the field of visual artists through casually engaging with fellow artists. Preece and Kerrigan (2015), discussing Uggla, mention the power of co-branding as it serves as brand leverage, helping to expand social capital through connecting works between artists. Two or more artists come together and create a combined work (objectified cultural capital), which speaks for their brand identities not only through the expansion of social but also cultural capital (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015).

Equally, cultural capital develops with time (Bourdieu, 1990). Styles may transform, and artists might change their idea of themselves (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). By being their own marketer (entrepreneur) artists can take control over their presented image and consequently brand identity, thus stirring into a preferred direction while still dependent on the audience's reaction towards their work and brand identity.

All in all, the development of a brand identity requires a lot of work and needs constant revision to generate the correct picture for an audience without a hint of misinterpretations (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). This kind of monitoring asks for additional tasks to supervise the construction and communication of brand identities successfully. The individual steps will be illustrated during the upcoming sub-section 2.3.4 Online branding, as an online environment offers many opportunities to do so (Khedher, 2014). All in all, cultural

as well as social capital forms a brand identity (Khedher, 2015). Further, an artist's brand identity tightly interconnects with the concept of artistic identity and consequently, an artist's style of life (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015).

2.3 Social media

The past chapters paved the rocky understandings of visual artists' working environment, the obstacles they have to deal with, efforts they have to undertake, and their identity construction. Following, they all are shaken up once more by the introduction of social media, as it affects every discussed factor.

The rise of Web 2.0 and its public access changed the way we communicate significantly as it allowed the private and the public sphere to merge (O'Reilly, 2005). Therefore, the force of the Web 2.0 affected various working environments from different economic industries (Mangold & Faulds, 2009); the sector of visual art is thereby no exception (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Precisely, the online sphere is lifting the veil between the producer (*artist*) and consumer (*online audience*), making intermediaries (*cultural institutions*) somewhat obsolete (Arora & Vermeylen, 2014).

Hence, previous one-sided marketing efforts turn into a two-way street as end-consumers can now directly react to a company's information and can share their word with a broader network community (O'Reilly, 2005). Additionally, greater self-disclosure and open profiles acquire more social capital (Shane-Simpson, Manago, Gaggi, & Gillespie-Lynch, 2018). Ultimately these changes also triggered "new types of client relationships, which are central to brand development and require us to think about brands in new ways" (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015, p. 1209). Consequently, the role of the online audience gains even more weight regarding the evaluation of brand identities.

Furthermore, social media promotes individual content creation. O'Reilly (2005) explains that besides reciprocal interactions, the online world is only functioning so well due to user-generated content (UGC). Social media purposes as an enabler of UGC by offering various tools to do so (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). This set of tools consists of five different categories: blogs, social network sides, communities, forums, and content aggregators. Salo et al. (2013) perceive many overlaps within these categories and decide to present social media tools as "embodiments and features of various online communities" (p. 25). The same applies for this research and, moreover, carries a heightened focus on the

social network sites (SNS) category. Furthermore, it concentrates on the most prominent platforms according to statistical user numbers and describe their features in more detail.

Currently, the US company Facebook dominates the SNS landscape (Statista, 2020). It is an umbrella company that includes platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and its namesake Facebook (Facebook, A). Statistical insights of January 2020 showed that Instagram can achieve an audience reach up to 60% of a countries population and making it one of the most far-reaching online networks with more than 1,000 million active users (Clement, 2020; Statista, 2020). Nevertheless, Facebook itself can still be considered the dominant social media outlet as it accumulates 2,499 million users at the beginning of the year. It is closely followed by YouTube and WhatsApp, with respective figures of 2,000 million and 1,600 million users (Statista, 2020). These high user numbers make it more attractive for companies or entrepreneurs to transfer their marketing efforts onto these SNS as they have a higher possibility of reaching consumers (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). WhatsApp will be excluded from the subsequent analysis as the platform is concentrating on direct messaging rather than communication to a dispersed audience (WhatsApp, n.d.).

Past research often considers online media to be an extension of ourselves and therefore appealing to certain personality traits (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). In general, Correa, Willard Hinsley, and Gil de Zúñiga (2010) evidence a connection between online behaviour and the characteristics of extraversion, emotional instability, or openness to experiences. People with any of those traits are more likely to interact and share on SNS than those without (Correa et al., 2010). A strong bias exists between the opposing attributes (i.e.: extroversion versus introversion) and the frequency of online self-presentation (Ong, et al., 2011). Hence extroverted people are more likely to post with ease compared to introverted ones.

Additionally, they are of high importance for social media users who communicate their brand identity online for a living such as entrepreneurs (Calcagno & Balzarin, 2016; Duffy, Pruchniewska, & Scolere, 2017). Singular entrepreneurs or online bloggers often integrate their identity into their social media marketing behaviour (Titton, 2015). The connection between brand identity and artistic identity is also applicable for artist entrepreneurs (Schroeder, 2005).

The preceding paragraphs underlined social media's importance in terms of marketing activities. Two of the most longterm celebrated paradigms are branding and relationship activities (Palmer, 1996). Although they are often considered to be separate entities, they are in fact inseparable. Although they are often considered to be separate entities, they are in fact inseparable. For decades it is already known that "both approaches seek to develop bonds between seller and buyer" (Palmer, 1996, p. 256). Hence they now must be transported into a social media environment to understand the applicability of the techniques' synthesis for emerging visual artists.

This research understands emerging visual artists to be one-person entrepreneurs, as they have not gathered enough economic capital yet to hire marketing and communication experts (Win, 2014). Hence their individual character traits ultimately affect their brand identity and social media performance; this insight is based on the findings of Correa et al. (2010). Followingly the two big online platforms, where the communication of brand identities prevails, are dissected (Statista, 2020).

2.3.1 Social media affordances

What is more, while all explained social media tools allow direct interactions between users within the private sphere and the public sphere, they all come with their own set of features. Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter and Valkenburg (2018) explain, citing Marwick and Boyd (2011), that "each social media platform presents a vastly different social context due to its unique features" (p. 1814). As a consequence, thereof the academics find that SNS can be ranked according to the expression of emotions. In descending order Facebook, Twitter and Instagram seem most appropriate to share negative opinions or experiences. Conversely, Instagram is perceived to be the most receptive to express positive emotions, followed by Facebook and Twitter (Waterloo et al., 2018).

This underlying emotional polarity across online channels also affects attendant affordances of each (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018; Waterloo et al., 2018). While technical SNS features promote emotional polarity (Waterloo et al., 2018), assumptions about the audience also change according to the platform, thus leading to *platform-specific self-branding* actions for bearers of brand identities (Duffy et al., 2017). Duffy et al. (2017) found that while a consistent online persona (brand identity) is generally recommended, slight variations across SNS are necessary to synchronise with the different affordances of each platform. These findings overlap with Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) proposition that some

people are more likely to become media personalities due to their ability to use special media formats.

Further, the thesis concentrates on the dominating online networks Facebook and Instagram. The sites' general technical features will be listed, and the attached affordances explained.

a) Facebook

This SNS offers the opportunity to establish some kind of online CV. Users can state their demographics (i.e.: age, gender, date of birth), interests, and hobbies as well as lifestyle details (i.e.: relationship status or location) (Facebook, B). They can share statements in the form of *status*, create events, form groups, and invite all of their online friends by tagging them. By using hashtags, postings can be grouped easily to find similar content (Facebook, B; Kywe, Hoang, Lim, & Zhu, 2012).

Facebook's portrayal of people's interests and other characteristics promotes opinion exchange among users and fosters online conversations, thereby functioning as a connecting force (Duffy et al., 2017). According to Shane-Simpson et al. (2018), it is easier to find people with common interests on Facebook. Also, creative entrepreneurs who self-brand themselves online explain that especially Facebook is more about conversations and the communication of perceptions rather than visuals or design (Duffy et al., 2017).

Another main difference of Facebook compared to other SNS is the form of social capital gained throughout the SNS. While Instagram allows *following* other people without being compelled to *follow back*, Facebook uses the term *befriend* to establish connections between profiles (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). This already hints at closer relationships among participants and foster more intimate connections.

During their interviews with creative entrepreneurs, Duffy et al. (2017) evidence similar qualities about their platform-specific self-branding efforts. Their study participants remark that endemic platform audiences guide their UGC decisions. Thereby Facebook is considered a more personal form of SNS where private content gets into the mix (Duffy et al., 2017).

b) Instagram

The platform highly focuses on visual content. Users can create and share their visuals and, in addition to that express who they are (Instagram, n.d.). This expression is

pursued through the form of permanent postings or 24-hour story snippets. Each contribution gives insights into the everyday life of users and accumulated present an online identity (Morris, 2014). Furthermore, the actions of tagging and sharing are also applicable to Instagram (Instagram, n.d.). Generally, in terms of demographics, Instagram's crowd is considered to be younger since they are more likely to switch to emerging networks compared to older SNS users (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018).

Instagram's focus on visuality is also found by Duffy et al. (2017). Further, the researchers uncovered that especially creative professionals whose work concerns visuals, are heavily using the platform compared to those who tend to write more. Although the platform is understood to be entirely visual, Duffy et al.'s (2017) respondents still mention that not every UGC is appropriate for the site due to its specific format measures. While Facebook offers wide vertical angles, Instagram mostly favours square frames, although pictures can also be mended to some extent (Duffy et al., 2017).

As explained in section a) Facebook, Instagram's *follow* option provides the opportunity to gather a vast number of followers based on a one-to-many social interaction (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). Although this form of social capital is based on loose and distal connections, it offers larger audiences in return. Compared to Facebook, Instagram is perceived to be a more professional form of SNS; therefore, UGC must be curated more carefully (Duffy et al., 2017). Fallon (2014) details that Instagram's "push toward greater visibility ... further enhances the autobiographical potential of the timeline" (p. 58).

The SNS is often referred to as an *album* that has a high emphasis on currency and consequently needs to be maintained continuously (Fallon, 2014). This requirement further contributes to establishing a continuous timeline with a focus on "now" while picturing one's past experiences and personal development (cultural capital). Only by continually, updating and expanding a profile, users remain an active part of their follower's feed (Fallon, 2014). Again, it has to be mentioned that Instagram has a profoundly positive atmosphere having no space for UGCs showcasing failures or setbacks, thus creating a unique atmosphere (Waterloo et al., 2018).

To summarise, SNS features affect how companies and entrepreneurs can interact with online audiences and further build long-lasting relationships with them (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Online networks allow artists to present their brand identity in an

unfiltered way directly to a dispersed audience, thereby depending on direct online crowd wisdom for value construction (Arora & Vermeylen, 2014). As suggested during the previous chapter, brand identities depict a convenient way for visual artists to undertake an entrepreneurial role and market themselves without intermediaries while relying upon online audiences to respond to their brand identities (Morris, 2014).

The presented social media network sites offer a fitting platform to do so but also influence brand identity practices and concomitant audience engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Morris, 2014). Further, Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) connect that substantial effort is needed to “ensure that information available on different social media applications is aligned and consistent” (p.31). This connection accentuates the importance of activity integration into the overall marketing plan of every social media participant: companies, entrepreneurs, and individuals alike.

In addition to Duffy et al.’s (2017) findings on platform-specific self-branding, the researchers also describe the phenomenon of *platform fluidity*. Their interviewees often mentioned the importance of the constant expansions of channel affordances. The most common reference thereby, was the 24-hour story feature on Instagram, which was a somewhat recent addition and still changes its appearance (Duffy et al., 2017). These changes demand a quick response of platform-specific self-branding efforts in a timely fashion.

2.3.2 Online branding

As mentioned by Schroeder (2005), celebrated visual artists are perceived as their own brand manager. Since online networks allow to bypass institutional gatekeepers, the emerging visual artist can undertake these marketing tasks directly (Arora & Vermeylen, 2014). The increased importance of social media outlets heightens the necessity of inclusive marketing tasks regarding personal branding (Shepherd, 2005; Yogev, 2010).

Generally, personal branding understands a “marketing concept related to the marketing strategies that a person adopts to promote his self in the market” (Khedher, 2014, p. 30). Furthermore, Labrecque et al. (2011) connect personal branding steps to an online framework. Thereby the scholars elaborate on the following steps to create and nurture an online brand:

- **Brand identity** concerns self-presentation in a computer-generated environment. Schroeder (2005) already draws many parallels between the identity of visual artists and brand identity, as both are inherently based on images to communicate a message. Throughout his works, he explains that images are transporting information that leads to the creation of identity. In connection, artistic subjectivity explains that visual artists' identity is mediated through their work (Win, 2014).
- **Brand positioning** aims to maintain a steady image through online actions that reveal personal information. In terms of social media, this includes every post or story contribution as they ultimately contribute to the overarching identity (Labrecque et al., 2011). Hence, it places the brand within a specific context.
- **Brand image assessment** detects mismatches between information posted by others and the focal person to assess self-stated online branding goals. Social online networks allow the constant exchange of thoughts and promote conversations. As a result, many opinions are buzzing within social networks that do not conform at all times. Carriers of brand identities need to make sure that their behaviour (verbal and non-verbal cues) is not misleading and convey a consistent image (Khedher, 2014).
- **Insufficient branding** regards a lack of online disclosure choices leading to an incomplete online identity.
- **Misdirected branding** changes previous misleading branding efforts to market a complete online identity.
- **Optimised branding** takes all adjustments of previous insufficiencies into account and changes behaviour accordingly to reach the desired brand identity.

According to Khedher (2014), these steps are reliant upon the three different online investments to sustain brand-related returns for entrepreneurs, companies, and individuals effectively. Khedher (2014) thereby refers to Bourdieu's (1983) capital theory as he translates it for the online sphere:

- (1) **Cultural capital** describes a continuous learning process to distinguish through unique characteristics presented on SNSs. By investing in the construction of an online brand identity, carriers can become more distinguished in the online sphere and stand out in a competitive environment (Khedher, 2014). Instagram profiles thus

provide an overview to oversee the expansion and change upon individuals in an online sphere (Fallon, 2014).

- (2) **Social capital** relies upon the development of an online relationship network to promote a public image. The opportunity to interact with a dispersed online audience directly enables anyone spread knowledge about their brand. Moreover, the number of followers per account serves as a peripheral cue for outsiders to assess a social media profile, hinting at the owner's social status (De Veirman et al., 2017).
- (3) **Economic capital** cultivates economic success and functions as leverage in the form of price distinctions (Khedher, 2014). The higher the previous two capitals are, plus the better they are used for marketing efforts, the higher the turn out of economic capital (Khedher, 2015).

In comparison to other marketing tools, social media allows a constant exchange of information between artist-entrepreneurs and online audiences (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012); hence a more detailed image can be communicated and expressed (Fallon, 2014; Win, 2014).

Most academics argue that brand identity has to be consistent (Labrecque et al., 2011). However, by looking at characteristics of the artistic identity and the concept of individualism and reflexive modernism, it was argued that reflections about past experiences have the potential to change one's (Taylor & Littleton, 2008a). The current research assumes that through constant communication and relationship marketing, brand identities can mend over time as they grow with the artist-entrepreneurs and their follower base. This perception coincides with Instagram's album character. The SNS exhibits one's past UBC throughout the profile documenting the progression of profile holders (Fallon, 2014).

2.3.3 Online relationship marketing

As described, social capital is crucial for the effectiveness of marketing a brand identity (Khedher, 2014). Moreover, it is essential to note that an artist's reputation is crowd dependent, meaning that consumer perceptions are likely to differ across different audiences (Gokhan et al., 2016). Consequently, to manage an artistic career, communication

efforts need to concentrate on specific target groups to maximise the positive effects of reputation and status.

A healthy consumer relationship supports close interactions with the designated target group; thus, sustaining relationships are nurtured by an audience's perception of privilege (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Any good online relationship is founded in user relations with social media content; this is promoted by (1) access to content, (2) sense of affinity, (3) participation, (4) interaction and (5) social identity (Salo et al., 2013).

The presuppositions supposedly generate intimacy between the two parties involved and lead to emotional relationships resulting in strong affective consumer commitment (Turri, Smith, & Kemp, 2013). Further, these emotions supposedly transform commercial sources into organic content (Kilgour, Sasser, & Larke, 2015).

- (1) Content has to be **effortlessly accessible** without any bypasses or thresholds (Salo et al., 2013). Relating, Kywe et al. (2012) argue that with the introduction of hashtags, single postings can be categorised and are therefore easy to find. Moreover, publicly accessible profiles support a growing social media follower base (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018)
- (2) **Affinity** has to be established not only between audience members but also between the artist-entrepreneurs and their audience (Salo et al., 2013). Many prominent artists reveal personal details to level with their followers and make themselves more relatable (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012).
- (3) Salo et al. (2013) also explain that relationships can be deepened by allowing followers to **participate**. Consistently, Morris (2014) mentions the success of Imogen Heap, who let their audience to peek behind the scenes of music production. The insight gives answers to many curiosities fans might wonder about: "Which tools are being used? How is the artist processing her ideas and continues her steps?" (Morris, 2014). This intimate shot fosters a strong bond between an artist and fans, going beyond fandom by letting people participate in the creative production process (Morris, 2014).
- (4) **Interaction** differs from participation in so far as it requires an artist's response to a follower's request (Salo et al., 2013). It points to the two-way communication benefits of social media (O'Reilly, 2005). Fan-artist interactions showed to be highly successful for many artists as they take followers' opinions

into account (Morris, 2014). Hence, online audiences become not only a direct observer but also a part of the cultural production process, which ultimately provides a greater role for previous outsiders. Special features of social media tools promote this behaviour, such as Instagram's option to vote in stories, asking for an opinion on what followers prefer (Instagram, n.d.).

(5) **Social identity** denotes a sense of community that is provided by followers' mutual interest in an artist's work and identity (Salo et al., 2013). Titton (2015) adds, quoting Marwick, that the preservation of a personal touch in the form of (for example) approachability is highly important. Only through an individual's personality, online brand identities can distinguish themselves from their competition on SNS (Titton, 2015).

If these steps are executed appropriately, so-called *crowd wisdom* could take place. The socio-economic component of social media logic is seen as "as the new guide to constructing and evaluating knowledge" (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014, p. 195; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). In the context of the art world and social media networks, it means that evaluation of the many trumps art's value assessment practices of cultural institutions. Even though the effect on prices is yet unclear, Arora and Vermeulen (2014) argue that social media practices may spread the word about an emerging artist but are unable to define the monetary worth of the work.

Van Dijck and Poell (2013) also describe the downside of the phenomenon as high like-scores might push some topics visibility but simultaneously devalue others. Although these algorithms try to properly capture social life outside the online world and built upon users' opinions, they also influence and manipulate their rankings. In order to achieve higher exposure, literature suggests complying with each channels' affordances to increase profile prominence (Duffy et al., 2017; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). It must be added that surpassing algorithmic gatekeepers demands the "ability to play the media and lure the crowds" (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 6).

To conclude, the theory section established that social media is opening the gates of the visual arts sector, letting supply and demand go loose (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Thereby handing emerging artists (also referred to as artist-entrepreneurs) the power of marketing their personal brand, relying upon online consumer assessment to generate value (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014; Khedher, 2014).

3. Methodology

The subsequent chapters illustrate the research as well as the data collection process. Each section will argue why certain methods or techniques are used and how the collected data will be analysed to assure further transparency throughout the process and support validity as well as reliability of the final results.

3.1 Qualitative research

To begin with, the research tries to obtain insights into how emerging visual artists market themselves on social media. Consequently, it does not aim at generalising findings for an entire population (Dworkin, 2012), but instead concentrates on acquiring a deeper understanding of a “complex and nuanced world” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 19). Existing academic literature is used as an approach to guide the research process and to “discover theoretical perspectives, including proper concepts to look at the social phenomenon of interest” (Boeije, 2010, p. 5). Due to the study’s aim of exploring a social phenomenon “in order to find empirical patterns” (p. 5), a qualitative method will be applied (Boeije, 2010). The approach assumes that “individuals have an active role in the construction of social reality” (p. 6) and thus tries to capture the process adequately (Boeije, 2010).

Dworkin (2012) clarifies that “qualitative research methods are often concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on meaning (and heterogeneities in meaning)—which are often centred on the how and why of a particular issue” (p. 1319). In fact, qualitative research aids in understanding how “people give meaning to their lives by interpreting their thoughts, experiences, actions and expressions” (Boeije, 2010, p. 8).

Dorussen, Lenz, and Blavoukos (2005) detail that “authoritative guidance carries even more weight” (p. 316), meaning that people with related field expertise provide greater insights into the topic of interest. Hence “qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13). An appropriate research method depicts qualitative in-depth interviews. In general, interviews aid in understanding individual experiences, reconstruct events and thus describe social processes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.2 Expert interviews

To answer the guiding research question and related sub-questions adequately, data needs to be collected in a fitting manner. The collection process in the form of in-depth interviews allows giving answers to the “*how* and *why* of a particular issue, process, situation, subculture, scene or set of social interactions” (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1319). As already indicated, by interviewing field experts, their precise knowledge about the field-specific circumstances can be extracted (Van Audenhove, 2007). Expert’s three-dimensional knowledge helps at understanding routines and processes through their direct involvement, interpreting subjective ideas and ideologies, and above all, gaining specific field information about operations (Van Audenhove, 2007). For these reasons, expert interviews (also known as elite interviews) are adopted to gain specific insights into the social media marketing process of emerging visual artists.

Contextually for the aim of the research, emerging visual artists are considered to be experts in social media marketing practices. This perception is based on the fact that although the group might be in the advent of their career, the research subjects are simultaneously the only ones with first-hand knowledge about the abilities or power of social media marketing practices at their specific occupational stadium (3.3.1 Sampling criteria). Artists further up or down the chain of success ought to behave differently online as they possess other premises, capital combinations, and resources.

The understanding is in accordance with Bogner, Littig, and Menz’s (2009) research. They describe the advantage of tapping experts as accessing an “exclusive realm of knowledge, which is highly potential because and in as far as it is linked with the power of defining the situation” (p. 18). Additionally, Van Audenhove (2007) explains that expert interviews are used when “subjective aspects of expert knowledge” (p. 13) are warranted. The focus lies on their “motives, routines, implicit beliefs impacting on functioning of experts and systems” (p. 13), all of which apply for the scope of the research.

Furthermore, Hermanowicz (2002) stresses the fact that interviews should unfold like conversations. Thus, it is important to carefully listen to respondents and probe or ask for further details whenever necessary. The interviewer and interviewee should take turns in talking like natural dialogues do as “questions and answers follow each other in a logical

fashion” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 10). Consequently, semi-structured interviews offer the perfect solution, as they provide a fitting operational framework (Rowley, 2012).

According to Rowley (2012), semi-structured interviews have a “varying degree of adaptation” (p. 262), allowing the interviewer to adjust the questions within a certain context but still react to the conversational partner. Herzog and Ali (2015) additionally mention that the open-ended orientation of semi-structured interviews flatters experts’ knowledge as it “allows them to move in a direction of their choosing” (p. 10).

Simultaneously they provide enough power for the researcher to stir the conversation according to the research topic.

The theoretical framework of the research guides the questions since “for scientific research the questions asked need to be related to theory in some way, and the answers need to be found by the use of systematic methods that must be adequately documented” (Boeije, 2010, p. 2). Consequently, a uniform topic list, which can be adapted for each interviewee to some degree, will be established in consistence with the provided theory (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016).

3.2.1 Reliability and validity

Throughout any qualitative research, *reliability* and *validity* need to be carefully maintained to ensure the “legitimacy of the conclusion” (p. 205) which aims at “adding to the already existing body of knowledge” (Boeije, 2010, p. 205). By arguing about the *reliability* and *validity* of research, transparency is gained, which provides retractability of each step, choice, and concomitant finding (Boeije, 2010). Further, both kinds will be described as well as connected to this very research.

Reliability determines a research’s “internal consistency and stability over time” (p. 206). Thereby standardised procedures provide a consistent framework to make collected data comparable (Boeije, 2010). Further, uniform processes are integrated throughout the data collection and analysis process. First, the interview guide is based on a standardised topic list that is used for every conducted interview, thus ensuring both consistency and stability. Second, every final interview transcription is evaluated by the same coder. While others need to ensure intercoder reliability by calculating Cronbach’s alpha (Boeije, 2010), the current study is enforced by a single researcher who’s understanding does not vary, making validity and judgment even more important.

Validity specifies the data assessment, which is “dependent on the use of the correct measures” (p. 206) to truly represent the phenomenon in question (Boeije, 2010). Consequently, the theoretical background of the study and its qualitative orientation demands an accurate data collection method to gather trustworthy information about the investigated topic. In the case of this research, the method of interviews harmonises with the posed overarching research question due to the qualitative nature of the study (3.1. Research design). Furthermore, collected information by means of expert interviews, “crucially depends on the quality of the experts” (Dorussen, Lenz, & Blavoukos, 2005, p. 333) For that matter, the careful sample selection adhered to pre-established characteristics. These were in support of the theoretical framework. Final results of this study are consolidated not only through the guidance of academic theory and fitting data, but also through multiple coding steps and constant repetition or extension as recommended by Boeije (2010) or Braun and Clarke (2008).

3.3 Data collection

The final interview partners must be chosen carefully since only a handful of people provides the right experience and therefore qualify as possible expert interviewees (Van Audenhove, 2007). Regarding the sample size, the majority of academics advise continuing the data collection process until theoretical saturation is achieved, or no new data arises from the collection process (Dworkin, 2012; Higginbottom, 2004). However, the scope of this particular research demanded to stick to pre-approved guidelines. Hence, the final selection consists of 12 people in total (Department of Media and Communication, methodological guidelines thesis research, 2019-2020).

Interviews are generally characterised through their *dynamic* and *responsive* manner (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A relationship between interviewer and interviewee needs to be constructed to “generate depth of understanding, rather than breadth” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 27). Information transparency is a key figure in gaining the expert’s trust, thus shaping the relationship significantly (Harvey, 2011). For that very reason, all necessary information was revealed from the moment of the first interaction. All questions of “who I am, where I am working, what the nature of my research is (in non-academic jargon), who is sponsoring me, how long the interview will take, how the data will be used, where the

results will be disseminated and whether the information will be attributed or anonymous” (p. 433) were disclosed accordingly (Harvey, 2011).

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following section will establish various characteristics to define possible interviewees for the final analysis process. Only if a potential respondent corresponds with those requirements, he or she classifies to pose as a unit of analysis (Boeije, 2010).

First and foremost, any participant must work in the sector of visual arts. As previously explained, the field encompasses various sub-disciplines which are ranging from painting over sculpturing until photography (Benhamou, 2013; Cherry, 2004). Consequently, workers and producers of any of those sub-disciplines constitute fitting interview partners.

While the specifics about the expression of visual art are loosely tied (UNESCO, 1980); an artist’s work ethic has to be defined more closely. Even though the harsh environment often pushes artists to pursue different career paths next to the purely artistic one, they do not affect their artistic core production (Throsby, 2007). Especially emerging artists who have not quite gained a foothold in the market yet, often try to keep their heads above water by occupying more than just one job (Benhamou, 2013; Rengers, 2002). These side occupations will not affect the characteristics of potential interview partners as it is common in the art scene to do so (Throsby, 2007).

Nevertheless, the research requires devotion to ensure commitment to the artistic career of each study participant. Hence, any interview partner must have the will not only to continue working in the sector of visual art but also to provide past achievements in the sector. Gokhan et al. (2016) relate the definition of an emerging visual artist to the time frame of their research. Their participants have to evidence small-scale career progression within the ten years of their study to qualify as emerging in the artistic sector. Thereby the academics define small-scale development as being exhibited at least once at either an art gallery or museum, as both are essential for visual artistic careers in the market (Gokhan et al., 2016). Moreover, the opportunity to be exhibited is an accepted indicator of artist success with an audience (Yogev, 2010). However, since the time frame of the thesis does not correspond with the study of Gokhan et al. (2016), amends have to be made. Deriving from the authors’ criteria, the selection requirements for the thesis demand that potential interviewees have been exhibited at an art gallery or museum at least once over the past three years.

What is more, the usage of social media describes one of the main pillars of this study. It, therefore, has to be integrated into the evaluation for the final selection of interviewees as well. All potential participants must use at least one social media platform (i.e.: Facebook or Instagram) for marketing their artistic work.

Besides the importance of social media usage, a certain degree of online presence is equally important to ensure the expert label of emerging visual artists in their field. Consequently, the study demands an SNS followership per artist of at least 1.000 profiles. Furthermore, it will only concentrate on the number of Instagram followers, as Duffy et al. (2017) argue that SNS provides a more professional atmosphere compared to Facebook.

To summarise, the following list includes all characteristics of potential interviewees which function as criteria to qualify as a participant of the study:

- Participants' occupation of multiple jobs at the same time does not affect their fit, as past research points at the general habituality of the circumstance (Throsby, 2007).
- Respondents have the aim to continue working in the visual arts sector with the potential to reach self-sufficiency.
- Interviewees had at least one exhibition in either an art gallery or museum over the past 3 years (Gokhan et al., 2016).
- The usage of social media platforms to promote artistic work throughout the career (Morris, 2014), and especially over the past three years.
- Specific boundaries of at least 1.000 Instagram followers to ensure the expert level of emerging artists. Instagram functions as a defining platform due to its more professional characteristic compared to Facebook (Duffy et al., 2017).

3.3.2 Interviewee list

Followingly a list of all interviewees is presented. Every participant is in accordance with the established research criteria. Their most important characteristics are briefly outlined to give a better understanding of each respondent. Furthermore, it was decided only to use their Instagram handle as a source of identification, since most are working under special artist names to distribute their work that differs from their birth name.

Table 1: Interviewees

Instagram handle	Past Exhibitions	Instagram followers	Description
@linda. .steiner	17	2 710	Worked for the past two years as a self-employed visual artist. Her passion is to connect with other local artists for joint projects. She sells her newest prints over Instagram as well as focuses on producing behind the scenes material of canvas paintings for her followers.
@flowsofly	10	423 000	Has the highest number of followers and interacts with them daily . Instagram stories, as well as posts, serve as daily opportunities to get to know his followers better and to talk about topics close to their hearts.
@ndcm_art	9	21 600	Besides the production of collage artwork, he concentrates on producing the perfect brand identity to support his work. His online work appearance profits from a close relationship with his exhibitions as he promotes them heavily before on social media.
@anneschinko	3	1 444	Likes to express her thoughts behind the work on Instagram and enjoys supporting colleagues on her channel through her stories.
@b_moura	27	1 682	Likes to mix private and business on her Instagram profile. Snippets of her daily life make a regular appearance in her stories. However, like the others, she also excludes friends and family from her online world.
@ axel.schindler	9	1 073	Uses Instagram to present his artwork portfolio and focuses on a professional appearance of his account.
@florineimo	12	4 582	Expresses a lot of herself on social media as well as through her art. Her brand identity is closely tied to her private and professional life.
@ mari.asanti	3	3 112	Enjoys the connecting mentality of artists in the online sphere and the possibilities of selling not only her prints but also the opportunity to engage in new work with fellow artists.
@iustas_	10	4 158	Found many prospects through the usage of hashtags which lead to his high number of Instagram followers.
@marietheresmadani	9	3 807	Was discovered over Instagram as an art gallery sent a request via direct message to exhibit her work. She works hard to promote her artwork online and to communicate her brand identity by showing herself behind the work.
@kingas_grapes	15	1 411	Also maintains a thorough brand identity by connecting herself with the artistic work, giving her followers a glimpse of how her daily life functions as well as behind the scene shots of work in progress.
@ hundert.zwanzig	6	2 295	Wants to communicate the importance of sustainability with her art and social media communication. The artist tries to convey that message with every post regardless if temporarily in her story function or permanently in her grid.

3.3.3 Selection process

The selection process of interviewee partners adhered to the pre-established the sampling criteria. The search proceeded over Instagram, through hashtags and the help of social media visual art galleries like @kunst_ab_hinterhof or @curatedbygirls. If a candidate was able to validate all sample criteria (3.3.1. Sampling criteria), he or she was contacted through direct messaging. Initially, six people were approached, who then referred to other fitting interviewees of their own network. The final interviewees are listed in section 3.3.2 Interviewee list.

Originally a purposeful sampling method was applied (Hammarberg et al., 2016). However, Van Audenhove (2007) characterises experts as networked people, contacting and interviewing one “easily leads to other interviews” (p. 5). Thus, as suggested, purposeful sampling turned into the snowballing method as the initial interview partners were asked for further fitting contacts, like themselves, who would be willing to participate in the study. This alteration allowed a natural expansion since connections within experts are hard to obtain (Van Audenhove, 2007; Hammarberg et al., 2016).

3.4 Operationalisation

Boeije (2010) suggests that “in qualitative research existing theory can be used more deductively as a background to see whether it applies to other settings or contexts” (p. 6). The provided theoretical framework, which draws on existing theory, therefore functions as a guideline for the analysis process. Concerning this, all sensitising concepts of the research will be wrapped up to operationalise their content inducing the analysis process.

The conceptual model consists of four distinct parts. First, (1) *Artist-entrepreneur and the professional environment* covers the basics of the artist and his or her scope of entrepreneurial activities on social media. Second, (2) *Social media marketing strategy* questions the image the artist tries to convey. Sub-themes include the adoption of stereotypes, the importance of complying with a sector’s habitus, but at the same time, to stand out, artistic subjectivity, and follower participation as they all influence an online appearance and expressed image. Third, (3) *Communication execution* deals with all online tools and actions taken by the artist to communicate said brand image. Sub-sections discuss the different channels’ affordances and actions related to relationship marketing

since social media’s uniqueness is the possibility of dual communication heightening the importance of online audiences. Lastly, (4) *Brand image assessment* investigates if emerging visual artists monitor their brand’s performance and if they take action if any mismatches are detected. Special attention is paid to reactions of positive or negative follower feedback/comments/messages, as they influence not only the brand but also artistic identity.

Table 2: Operationalisation

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
Artist-entrepreneur + professional environment	Validation of the interviewee criteria and entrepreneurial tasks as well as social media usage.	<p>Validating interviewee criteria</p> <p>For what purpose are you generally using social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amount of channels/platforms - Artist-entrepreneur - Self-promotion
Social media marketing strategy	The usage of artistic identity and its cultural and social capital to communicate a single and unique form of brand identity to a dispersed online audience. Brand identity is also shaped by the relationship marketing tool of <i>participation</i> , as it nourishes deeper connection and thus communicates a feeling of privilege.	<p>How would you say that you market your work and yourself on social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online image creation - Brand positioning - Artistic integrity - Expanding the brand image through follower participation
Communication execution	All online communication activities to position the desired brand identity on social media. Every action has to support the ultimate brand identity but possibly needs to be altered according to each channel and its distinct affordances. Establishing relationships with followers is of the utmost importance as it underlines social media’s connectivity. Core operations are easy accessibility of online profiles, affinity, participation, and interaction.	<p>What actions are you taking to convey this brand image?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media affordances - Audience interaction - Visibility & Algorithms
Brand image assessment	Monitoring activities to oversee if the past actions contribute to the brand identity or if there is a potential mismatch between audience perception and the artist’s communication.	<p>How are you monitoring activities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generating online reach - Feedback evaluation

3.5 Data analysis

After the conducting interviews, a thematic analysis approach will be adopted to identify, explore, and investigate underlying sensitizing theoretical concepts and simultaneously look for emerging patterns (Boeije, 2010). Braun & Clarke (2008) support the concept by explaining: "Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data." (p. 78).

This flexibility is provided through a combination of inductive and deductive approaches (Boeije, 2010). While underlying theoretical concepts guide the analysis, it also looks for data purely stemming from data. However, the final arrangement is mainly based on concept-driven analysis as it connects to the previously established theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

The ultimate goal of thematic analysis is to divide the collected data into smaller segments and reassemble them in a meaningful way, to gain additional insights (Boeije, 2010). To simplify the process, Braun and Clarke (2008) propose six guiding phases. These include familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming those, and lastly, the production of a report.

To begin with, after retrieving the underlying data of the interviews, it needs to be transcribed accordingly (Braun & Clarke, 2008). This process simultaneously offers the opportunity to familiarise oneself with the content. Transcription will be supported by the online programme 'Amberscript' systematically examined. By tending to the recordings immediately after their conduction, further topics or questions can be integrated (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The next step of generating initial codes equates to Boeije's (2010) procedure of open coding and orients itself towards the research's theoretical concepts. Following the transcripts get fragmented into smaller units to successfully determining meaningful content (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Thereby a broad draft of codes will be created, providing an overview of the provisional themes which relate to the literature theory of the research (Boeije, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2008). In terms of expert interviews, Van Audenhove (2007) suggests labeling and sort paragraphs according to the interview topic list. To obtain an overview of all evolving codes, the online coding software 'ATLAS.ti' will be employed.

Consecutively, open coding turns into the search for precise themes (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Again, the theory strongly overlaps with Boeije's (2010) approach of axial coding. Both steps aim at defining dominant data concepts. Thereby "communalities, diverging or conflicting points of view" (p. 29) of expert opinions are especially interesting (Van Audenhove, 2007); the examination focuses on different properties and overall dimensions of each initial code, which eventually become so-called axes (Boeije, 2010). These axes further guide the coding process as they allow to match main theoretical themes with supportive subcategories leading to a hierarchical structure.

Revision of all existing themes aids to refine, select, and integrate all codes to create not merely connections but establish thorough relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Hence, all previous analysis stages eventually result in the essence captivation of each derived theme. Their name tags should already communicate the conveyed message, thus mirroring the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Lastly, the defined themes need to be reported on and lead to the final conclusion of the research. The text should thereby convince the reader of its applicability and importance (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Fitting and precise examples should underline each theme provide a better notion of its content.

4. Results

The research investigates the circumstances of emerging visual artists' work environment and common social media marketing activities to understand further how they make use of social media marketing tools. Succeeding literature recognises the importance of building a brand identity to drive social media performance as well as the necessity to engage with followers to form relationships (Labrecque et al., 2011; Turri et al., 2013; Shepherd, 2005). The conducted interviews provided close insights into emerging visual artists' most common social media marketing practices, revealing day-to-day activities as well as prevailing constraints. Overall, twelve interviews have been analysed within a thematic approach and paid special attention to preceding academic research. Thereof four different themes and their appendant subthemes emerged from the data and ultimately helped at answering the research question.

The first theme is called *The emerging visual artist's social media toolbox*. It overarches all other themes and explains how emerging visual artists generally use social

media and targets the topic of platform prominence. Second, *Artistic values hinder social media strategies* concentrates on performed social media strategies that are used to convey an emerging visual artist's brand identity. The third theme, *Instagrammable self-promotion*, illustrates the various platform-specific affordances which are most commonly used by the interviewees to execute their online communication as well as argues about the nature of artist-follower relationships. Lastly, the theme of *Account care is self-care* will dissect platform development, applied monitoring activities, and the thoughts behind them.

4.1 The emerging visual artists' social media toolbox

As explained by Fletcher (2008), visual artists are nowadays considered to be artist-entrepreneurs as they overtake managing activities themselves, challenging the incumbent gatekeeping function of cultural institutions. Win (2014) lists the following activities of artist-entrepreneurs that go beyond their daily creative tasks: marketing, self-promotion, communication, funding, sales, and distribution. These work especially well in an online environment as it offers the opportunity for visual artists to distribute content to a dispersed audience (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014). The same pattern was prominently found for this study since all interviewees consider social media as a way to reach self-sufficiency since it can be used in numerous ways. As an example, one expert indicated that:

Without it [social media] I probably could not survive. ... At that, I still reach thousands of people and do not pay a cent for it. I would consider Social Media as extremely important for artists.

(@ndcm_art)

The central pattern illustrates the power of social media as it indeed allows emerging visual artists to gain a foothold in the market and circumvent institutional constraints by communicating directly online and for free. Overall this finding perfectly overlaps with the studies of Yogev (2010) as well as Arora and Vermeulen (2014). While the first author explains that visual artists are often limited in their actions to gain fame and reach self-sufficiency by cultural institutions, the second one recognises social media as an escape from this surrounding by leaping over gatekeepers and talk directly to a dispersed online audience (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014; Yogev, 2010). Again, the underlying theory perfectly confirms the current study data. The following statements are examples of the dominant research pattern:

It just turned out to be the perfect marketing tool. So, I use it like this deliberately. It is also an affordable alternative to classic advertising tools

(@kingas.grapes)

Instagram is a highly effective marketing tool if you use it correctly and distribute the right content.

(@marietheresmadani)

Both examples (representative for the entire data set) clarify that the artistic community values social media as a whole since the platforms can again be used for free and do not cut into their limited budget.

Nevertheless, the second message mentions the correct usage of social media and especially Instagram, thus leading back to Win's (2014) list of entrepreneurial activities for artists. Previously it has been found that artist-entrepreneurs often appear to struggle with their occupational duality. It includes, the combination of their expressional level of artistic work and their performance-centred ambitions (Calcagno & Balzarin, 2016; Fletcher, 2008). To be more precise, academia found that artist-entrepreneurs ever so often perceive their artistic quality as superior compared to their market-oriented activities (Calcagno & Balzarin, 2016). The exact same was found for emerging visual artists. All artists expressed their confusion about the specifics of social media's correct usage as well as their difficulty to understand provided platform insights:

Not really. I am also really bad at this. I've changed not so long ago for a business account. It has a lot of benefits, but I also don't really understand these things.

(@b_moura)

The finding is best exemplified by the expert's opinion above. Moreover, the research now supports earlier research of Calcagno and Balzarin (2016) on artists' struggle with performance centered tasks. Repeating, the preceding paragraphs illustrated the emerging visual artists' appreciation of social media's possibilities as well as their difficulties in understanding their effects to the full extent. However, with regard to the economic incentives of artist-entrepreneurs, it was found that the study participants are using social media for all points of Win's (2014) list of entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, the data hinted at the unique role of Instagram among every participant. In fact, eleven out of twelve artists considered Instagram as their first platform of choice:

And then I noticed: Ok, this (Instagram) is the better platform to promote my pictures.

(@linda._.steiner)

... Instagram became the next work platform, for especially artists I would say. ... So, I have pretty much transitioned to Instagram

(@b_moura)

I primarily use Instagram.

(@marietheresmadani)

These are only a few of the participants' responses when asked what their primary social media working platform was. When further questioned about the reasons for their choice, the reactions of responses was widespread. Instagram's most favourable characteristics for emerging visual artists are its global audience, the focus on visuals and, a noticeable business atmosphere. All those characteristics are included in the following sub-themes as they influence social media tools. Although Instagram's prominence among emerging visual artist is confirmed, it is still important to mention that shared content must be differentiated across each channel (Duffy et al., 2017). The majority of interviewees shared this understanding:

And I use each platform as I see fit and how it seems to work the best. So, some things are actually just shared on Facebook which I do not post on Instagram. This happens very rarely but when you look at my website to see the whole thing, you will notice the difference.

Surely, I share more on Instagram, because it just offers the perfect landscape to do so, because you can also share a little bit behind the scenes. So, depending on which platform I present different things.

(@marietheresmadani)

The following sub-themes will detail more closely how artists use social media and especially argue about Instagram's benefits since it can now be considered a toolbox with a variety of potential actions (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014; Win, 2014). The categories are presented in ascending order according to an action's importance measured by the number of found codes.

4.1.1 Minimal follower interaction

The sub-theme with the least number of codes covers social media's possibility to interact with followers. Thereby the pattern shows how emerging visual artists hardly turn

to their followers and ask them questions directly. Generally, the online sphere profits from being a two-way street, meaning that every participant has the opportunity to voice his or her own beliefs and is not degraded to the mere beholder of advertisements (O'Reilly, 2005). Nevertheless, the majority of the experts perceived follower interaction as too time-consuming and limiting their artistic work, thus turning the two-way communication street into a one-way highway. The following statement best exemplifies the pattern:

You know, like I kind of want to concentrate on my [artistic] work ... because I feel like it just takes so much energy and time in order to be online all the time.

(@iustas_)

The expert's quote exemplary argues why almost all emerging visual artists often cut back on online interactions as they have to manage more than one task by communicating on social media, thus reasoning with Win (2014). The analysis further showed that most interviewees consider other tasks as more important and queue the handling of interaction at the end of the list of their duties.

The interviewees' behaviour opposes past findings on how to foster online relationships with followers. To be precise, Salo et al. (2013) divided online relationships into five different categories to generate intimacy between the parties involved, most of which are time-consuming activities and need to be executed with the utmost care. Especially the reference point of *interaction* requires a lot of attention as it aims at including followers' opinions in the production process by asking direct questions. Integrating a whole crowd and implementing all of their ideas and responses into the development of artistic work demands artists to plough the lion's share of their attention to managing those responses. Thereby performance-centred ambitions often take over the expressional level of artistic work (Calcagno & Balzarin, 2016).

Although the theory recommends executing *interaction* tasks to build wholesome relationships, it simultaneously also argues why it might be impossible for artist-entrepreneurs to do so. Hence it perfectly underlines the sub-theme's dominant pattern and especially emerging visual artists' work-environment.

4.1.2 Perfect outlet for art

The second sub-theme supports the previous one to the extent artists perceive social media as a simple outlet for their art, thus disregarding once more the opportunity of follower interaction.

So, when you are an artist, of course, you want to show your work somewhere. ... this is why Instagram or social media as a whole, which are inherently visual, work so well for us [emerging visual artists] as they are oriented to our benefits.

(@florineimo)

The phrase perfectly mirrors the understanding that artists overlook the many actions offered by different platforms and only concentrate on presenting their art in the online world. They strictly want to separate their mode of cultural production from their online communication as they often highlight that they do not produce for the sake of social media. However, it still must be noted that emerging visual artists surely conform with a channel's individual affordances but simply avoid any interaction step. In terms of Bourdieu's (1983) capital theory, this can be understood as intensely focusing on cultural capital to generate economic capital while overlooking the benefits of social capital. This was true for the vast majority of experts, and is best exemplified by the following quote:

I have the feeling that I just co-produce for social media. In other words, I am not producing for social media but rather for myself or a project. Social media is simply an outlet. There I just show what I have done.

(@linda._.steiner)

The statement concludes that no extra efforts added to the production process to create a wholesome online image. However, as explained every, social media platform comes with its own set of features, which in turn allows people to present in an online environment (Duffy et al., 2017; Waterloo et al., 2018). Thereby emerging visual artists consider Instagram's visual character as the most favourable platform aspect to present their art. Although Duffy et al. (2017) already found this symbiosis, it needed to be highlighted once more:

On Facebook, my posting behaviour was very weak. And Instagram is much more exciting for people who work with visuals.

(@axel.schindler)

Because it [Instagram] promotes pictures. I am not a really good writer, so Twitter makes no sense for me, and Facebook is too private. So yeah, Instagram is more authentic. And pictures are still my profession.

(@linda._.steiner)

Nevertheless, only because Instagram promotes the sharing of visuals does not imply that every picture automatically fits into the platform's layout (Duffy et al., 2017). The greater share of all interviewees shared this perception and explained that it takes more work to achieve the perfect match between their actual work and the final post shared on Instagram or Facebook.

Instagram's grid offers something different than the one of Facebook. Also, format-wise, you always have to think about what fits good for this certain medium or platform.

(@marietheresmadani)

4.1.3 Selling on social media

With the presentation of artworks often comes the selling of those (Schroeder, 2005; Win, 2014). All participants reported to have already sold artworks over either social media platforms but do not describe the specifics of it. Anyhow, it is now known that the direct creation of economic capital over social media is possible for emerging visual artists.

I also look at Instagram in a way of somehow growing my potential client list as well ... it [social media] has already brought me some commissions from some people, so I know it works already.

(@iustas_)

The example shows that the artist in question already sold some of his paintings on social media and treats his followers as potential clients, thus ascribing them a bigger role than one of the former two sub-themes. He and the remaining interviewees perceive followers as a valuable asset and potential buyers who contribute to his economic capital. Many academics before already argued that social media opens the previous controlling gates between supply and demand (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The research now considers this to be applicable for emerging visual artists.

And I especially notice that the more followers I have the more I sell, specifically on Instagram. During Christmas time it is the most difference. Earlier, that changed nothing

where I had under 800 followers, but now with 2500 I can definitely feel a difference. It has really changed. So, I see that the work I put into social media literally pays off.

(@linda_.steiner)

The artists' understanding coincides with Khedher's (2014) works about the connection of capital theory with personal branding. Although Arora and Vermeulen (2014) argue that an artist's amount of social media followers does not define the monetary worth of an artist's work, the sheer increase of those numbers supports the quantity of sold artworks thus impacting an artist's economic capital one way or another. In other words, the number of followers does indeed not stir the artist's direct monetary value but heightens the possibility of selling more artworks in general. Besides the actual selling on social media, artists also report to have more requests and initial contact over social media:

The first contact I have to say mostly happens over Instagram and Facebook rather than over phone or E-mail. ... The threshold to communicate on social media is way lower compared to writing an E-mail.

(@ndcm_art)

The exemplary statement indicates that nowadays, art buyers often prefer to directly text the originator of a visual artwork on social media.

4.1.4 Expanding professional networks with ease

Besides the contact with potential end consumers, social media also offers the possibility to socialise with fellow workers or institutions further up the distribution chain (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014). Artists can draw the attention of cultural institutions upon them the same way they interest everyone else. Usually, to enter wholesome functioning networks, visual artists must be formally introduced to those in charge (Yogev, 2010). Without proper connections to cultural institutions, it is often impossible for emerging visual artists to get exhibited.

Succeeding research criticises social media's crowd wisdom effects on the artworld and accuses it of dismantling the crucial position of talented art connoisseurs and critiques (Arora & Vermeulen, 2014). However, the past finding does not connect to crowd wisdom (the number of followers or responses; an emerging visual artist gets). It rather explains that art galleries or museums can now discover visual artists at any career stage and that a visual artist's discovery is not contingent upon the number of followers.

As I said, I sometimes got invited over social media to participate in exhibitions. I think that without it [social media] would not have gotten the opportunity to be a part of those. I also got commissions over social media. I started making prints and sold them over social media.

All with people I did not know before.

(@anneschinko)

The past example of the sub-theme's pattern perfectly reports how social media made it possible to acquaint emerging visual artists with local art galleries through social media. The interviewee did not have any prior contact with any of the other parties, nor did she reach out to them. There were no formalised actions taken by the artist to engage with cultural institutions, thus opposing Tamar Yogev's (2010) observations about the fixed routines of the art world. It appears that social media is turning the tables since this artist's story was experienced by the out of all twelve interviewees, empowering emerging talents by offering a platform to present. Another artist expressed how he and many others came to exhibit their work with the help of social media:

Yes, it is just so super. There are many young talents involved and I just caught their attention over Instagram.

(@ndcm_art)

The artist already hints at the unique role of Instagram in the context of finding new work on social media. In fact, all participants told to use social media for business purposes. Hence a main determinator was to find a platform that fits their incentive. Thereby 92% of all participants expressed favouring Instagram due to its business atmosphere.

Also, that Facebook became a bit useless to me in the sense that, you know, Instagram somehow became much more professional platform as well, because, again, connect yourself to all other artists all over the world in a much more clear and accessible way and galleries and with everything

(@b_moura)

The statement explains that Instagram offers an atmosphere of like-minded people and provides valuable connections for artist-entrepreneurs' professional needs hence establishing a suitable online environment for the interviewees' marketing efforts. Duffy et al. (2017) already label Instagram as *the more professional platform* compared to Facebook, a *more personal channel*. The analysis comes to the same conclusion but accounts for different reasons for the dichotomy among channels.

The focus is really on the professional side and on the business goals.

(@marietheresmadani)

Facebook has a much more personal look. So, there you have a lot of people from your broader circle of friends or people you have already met once or seen somewhere when going out, whatever. That means Instagram is much more distant and professional.

(@marietheresmadani)

The former researchers found that the main contributor to Facebook's personal atmosphere is the behaviour of the artists themselves. Their study stated to continue using the original private Facebook account and merely post switch to posting work-related content instead of starting a whole new page (Duffy et al., 2017). However, the majority of the present study's participants specified to use purely professional accounts, set up, especially for work purposes. Nevertheless, strong connections between the emerging visual artists and their Facebook friends or fans are found. It was of interest as to why this personal atmosphere was creeping back up even though the emerging visual artists made a clear cut between pleasure and business.

You can find my profile [Facebook] without already being connected with me. But there is this function where you can invite your friends list to like a page or you repost it on your private profile to get Facebook likes. So, there is a certain limit as to what extend you can reach people.

(@marietheresmadani)

So, it [number of Facebook followers] is more concentrated on Europe. Primarily Austria, Hungary and Romania, I think. Just because I have a lot of personal connections to these parts, so it is not the same coverage [as Instagram].

(@kingas.grapes)

The answers tell that even if a new account is set up, it is often hard to detach oneself from already gained Facebook friends. The first statement explains that she invited all of her already existing Facebook connections to join her new work profile, thus keeping up the strings. The finding relates to research of Shane-Simpson et al. (2018) on platform affordances. The study discovered that Facebook nurtures stronger connections by allowing people to *befriend* each other rather than just *follow* an account like on Instagram. The

second answer illustrates that no matter how far you go online, Facebook will always make you reach out for people who are connected to you in real-life.

4.1.5 Nothing beats self-promotion

By far, the most prominent theme among the study participants was the topic of self-promotion. While the past themes evidenced the artists' actions of simply presenting their art, all interviewees showed to be highly aware of the fact that social media always asks for more.

Yes, it [social media] is just somehow a very good tool, first of all, because you can promote yourself and your work, I also sold some of my artwork over Instagram.

(@linda_..steiner)

I just have the feeling that image is extremely important, and it [social media] is still an image tool, that's why I use it like this on purpose.

(@ndcm_art)

Indeed, social media provides the perfect environment for anyone to communicate a personal brand as a marketing concept to promote oneself online (Duffy et al., 2017; Khedher, 2014). During the first statement, the artist in question lists all of her online communication activities, thereby she puts self-promotion at first place, signalling that it is the most important marketing activity to execute online. Furthermore, the second statement draws a direct line between social media and the creation of an online image, recognising the activity as social media's sole purpose. The content of the previous statements applies to the vast majority of interviewees, hence building the sub-themes pattern. Furthermore, these insights are related to Schroeder's (2010) research, which is clarifying that any accomplished visual artist's personal branding effort is taken not only to promote artistic work but rather a personal brand, which is still the determinant of the product's final monetary value.

However, the researcher only seems to acknowledge the branding efforts of visual artists who already gained fame, ignoring those who still fight for being recognised (Schroeder, 2010). The present research changes this perception: social media brand identities are not only for artists who already gained fame but rather exist to gain fame.

Moreover, academia is convinced that visual artists' brand identities are a close copy of their actual personality (Duffy; Schroeder, 2005). This accounts for the reason of artistic subjectivity and the fact that visual artists are often singular entrepreneurs whose capacity

demands them to stick to what they know best (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014; Correa et al., 2010). The data proved this theoretical concept; ten interviewees told to translate their actual personality into their social media brand identity without submitting any changes:

... [social media] can also be a little bit I would say dangerous, I don't really have a better word right now, but how you show yourself and that is often like getting a label. And this is why I am still a little bit careful with how I want to market myself as a person. Because artistically you are very closely connected to your work. You get associated with it so much. I find it a little complicated, you know? That you create such an image, an online persona who you have to stay faithful to.

(@florineimo)

The statement confirms Win's (2014) theory about artistic subjectivity as it explains the connection of the artist with her work. The interviewee further admits to experience difficulties when sharing not only her art but rather herself online. It suggests that her online brand identity is indeed a close copy of her character, thus coinciding with the research of Correa et al. (2010), Titton (2015), as well as Preece and Kerrigan (2015). It is also noteworthy that no connection between the characteristic of extraversion and increased posting behaviour, was detected among the experts. Hence the results are opposing the findings of Correa et al. (2010).

It can be concluded that the creation of online brand identities of emerging visual artists is a common tool to gain awareness. Thereby the participants are not communicating imaginary online personas but rather make their life part of their social media brand.

4.2 Artistic values hinder social media strategies

While the previous theme perfectly illustrated the most celebrated social media tools and further argued about Instagram's prominence among emerging visual artists. The current theme will concentrate more on the study participants' social media strategy (brand identity and relationship marketing) as well as their intentions behind it.

To begin with, the vast majority of interviewees mentioned to act online as they see fit without being constrained to previously established plans or social media rules:

So you can see a lot of things online. And of course, you are getting influenced that you have to post regularly. That you have to be active. That you have to do something in one specific

way. And this might bring you to the point where you are not doing anything that you really want anymore. It just turns into solely business.

(@anneschinko)

The quote perfectly captures the group's collective fear of turning into a pure business account without any relation to artistic values, thus highlighting discrepancies between self-promotional activities and the importance of artistic integrity. Among all interviewees, their detected actions and system averse attitudes ultimately contradict literature suggestions. Normally, when executing any performance-centred ambition, a certain degree of professionalism is mandatory (Calcagno & Balzarin, 2016; Fletcher, 2008). In connection, past research often mentioned the deployment of Bourdieu's (1983) threefold capital theory to execute branding and relationship activities strategically (Khedher, 2014; Labrecque et al., 2011; Salo et al., 2013). However, the opposite was found while interviewing emerging visual artists.

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that their entrepreneurial background demands the emerging visual artists always to keep an eye on their commercial performance as they are often financially dependent upon it (Win, 2014). The data also showed the following two strategies among emerging visual artists when it comes to executing their marketing duties.

4.2.1 Reluctance to be commercial

The observed vibrant tension between the topics of artistic integrity and social media's commercial purpose primarily affects the emerging visual artists' self-presentation efforts. The data, as well as past research already clarified (4.1.5 Nothing beats self-promotion), that emerging visual artists' brand identity is a close copy of their character. Hence when they were verbally confronted with the thought of them being an actual brand, only three out of the whole lot were in accordance with the perception. Throughout the remaining interviews, some sort of commercial progress emerged, which is best captured by the following three statements:

I can't say really say that [an artist is a brand]. I don't really know, but what I do observe is that Instagram is commercialising art. Everything gets pushed into one direction, and everything you see are paintings of women with plants.

(@anneschinko)

Of course, I want to publish something every day, this is personal pressure I put upon myself that motivates me. To do something new every day. But without any planning tools, to keep a certain degree of freedom. ... I post and produce for myself. And even if I do not have the highest engagement rate, I don't take it that seriously.

(@flowsofly)

So last year I really started trying to post every day. Quasi feeding the algorithm and it actually works, which is kind of scary. Because if I do that, I also get something out of it. I get way more followers and also sell more but it also annoys me. Giving in is for sure no fun. It annoys me and this is the work.

(@linda._.steiner)

Combined, these quotations perfectly introduce the three steps of emerging visual artists' relation with social media marketing activities, titled for this research as the *commercial walk of shame*. The title was chosen due to the observation of the research subjects giving in to common social media marketing behaviour as they noticed the direct connection of their behaviour with their rising success. Most importantly, the word *shameful* was chosen as all interviewees in question almost felt ashamed when talking about their positive social media conformation experience.

The first quote illustrates the finding of artists initially refraining from behaving according to the standards of social media as they pity the commercialisation of the platform. The theoretical framework already mentioned the restricting practices of online networks as algorithms push some topics more than others according to the number of like scores (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). It is now known that emerging visual artists perceive those algorithms as gatekeepers of the online world as they once more try to push art into one direction just as gatekeepers of the cultural industries do as previously found by Tamar Yogev (2010).

The following step shows the artists' change of hearts as they admit to altering their posting behaviour, but still, refrain from taking reference numbers such as the engagement rate or the number of followers seriously. From this perception, a strong connection to Taylor and Littleton's (2008a) social repertoire of *money-as-validation* can be drawn. Although, instead of monetary gains, artists rather understand high social media reference numbers as a sacrifice to their creative quality.

Finally, the artists come to a point where they start to acknowledge their rising (financial) success brought about their increased social media behaviour. Although the participants are still reluctant in terms of working on their brand identity in connection with social media promotion activities to promote their artistic work, they eventually come around and put their economic needs a little higher. Concluding, it must be mentioned that each step was observed within nine out of all twelve interviews, thus validating the observation's applicability.

4.2.2 Silent online relationships

The past themes already showed to what extent emerging visual artists work on their online relationship with their followers. The current sub-theme expands on those findings. However, emerging visual artists' social media communication has already been successfully compared to a one-way highway as the vast majority of interviewees do not directly interact with their followers. Nevertheless, the overall data also presented that emerging visual artists do, indeed, work on their online relationships in different ways. One interviewee made use of the phrase "silent relationships" to describe the majorities passive behaviour correctly:

I make very silent postings in the sense that I'm never really asking a question or asking for an opinion. ... I think the relationship with the followers is very simple. It comes from the liking or commenting, but never really a strong communication unless some really ask something directly then for sure I answer.

(@b_moura)

This statement is valid for ten out of all twelve experts, evidencing that emerging visual artists are always willing to talk or message with their followers directly, but are simultaneously not the ones who take the initiative to start the conversation. Hence silent relationships are likened with passive behaviour communication behaviour of emerging visual artists.

Previously this absence of interaction has been accounted for lack of time resources of artist-entrepreneurs (4.1.1 Minimal follower interaction). Although the online relationship's silent character appears to create a biased artist-follower relationship, this assumption is far from true. On the contrary, according to the overall interviewees, it allows to nurture functioning wholesome relationships equally:

Just then the connection happens, you know, and you see some stuff in stories and then you feel like, you know the person, and stuff like that. ... I think it's funny, you know, and sometimes you don't know a person, but you know that, you know, it kind of works in an interesting way but it works.

(@iustas_)

Of course, when I think about what relationship I have with other artists, that I follow and possibly don't know in real life, then I would say 'inspirational'. That always pulls me up, inspires me, shows me new perspectives. And I think that I can definitely have that with my followers.

(@marietheresmadani)

All respondents stated to use different Instagram functions to share not only their artistic work but also work-related content regularly, promoting their online relationships. Here a strong connection to the theoretical framework is found, explaining that any kind of relationship (social capital) between a brand and its online followers contributes to the final image of said brand (Khedher, 2014). Thereby the techniques of *accessibility*, *affinity*, *participation*, *interaction*, and *social identity* have been detailed more carefully (Salo et al., 2013).

Taking a closer look at the exemplary statements, it becomes clear that emerging visual artists understand to provide knowledge about themselves with their social media content for their followers without the primary necessity of actually being physically acquainted. First, by pointing at the story function and its opportunity to offer quick insights into the daily life of people, emerging visual artists execute the step of affinity. Second, the same function is used by almost every interviewee to make their followers *participate* in their mode of cultural production. Finally, all respondents concluded that these functions allow creating a picture of knowledge. The person on the other side of the screen becomes familiar even without even knowing him or her.

To conclude, emerging visual artists are deliberately adapting the techniques of *affinity*, *participation*, and *social identity* to expand their online relationships with their followers. Simultaneously they intentionally avoid the step of *interaction* when it comes to communicating with their social media followers (more throughout the subsequent chapter).

4.3 Instagrammable self-promotion

The present research already discovered that Instagram's unique platform characteristics perfectly support the presentation of the artist and his or her artworks. Although it was argued that artists most importantly see social media platforms as a way to distribute their work, eleven out of all twelve interviewees favoured Instagram as it offers more characteristics that support their professional field. The finding has already been mentioned during chapter 4.1 The emerging visual artists' social media toolbox. The platform's characteristics comprise visibility, globality, business atmosphere, combination professional, as well as private content. All of which contribute to Instagram's prominence.

I ended up quite enjoying this because I think it should, there shouldn't be any difference between the person that I am and the work that I make. ... I really like it. I think I want exactly to make this consistency between the person, you know, between the person doing the work and the work.

(@b_moura)

The previous quote perfectly introduces one of the most important characteristics of Instagram. To be more precise, it was found that the platform offers the perfect features to introduce a brand identity that is closely connected to emerging visual artist persona as they can give their followers a glimpse of who they really are. In other words, emerging visual artists combine professional and private life to self-promote on social media. The finding is in accordance with Preece and Kerrigan's (2015) research, which showed that visual artists' brand identities reach beyond artistic subjectivity, as their life becomes part of said brand identity. The concept is now even expandable to online brand identities.

Summarising, Instagram's affordances allow to perfectly associate objectified and cultural capital to create an online brand identity further, thus supporting Khedher's (2014) system about capital theory defining self-promotion activities. It is now equally important to understand which exact steps are taken to create an online image on Instagram.

Throughout the interviews, all participants declared that Instagram is not only for the art but also for the artist behind it. Schroeder explained in 2010 that the artist behind the work is, in fact, the determinator of the work's monetary value. Consequently, Instagram offers the perfect environment to set the focus on the originator of the creative

work. One participant briefly summarises the connection between emerging visual artists' online communication and their life:

Just like: This is me and this is what I do.

(@florineimo)

The secret as to why Instagram is working so well in communication art, and the artist behind it is twofold. First, it can be accounted for the endurance of the grid as every post is stuck on one's Instagram profile, at least for a while, defining the surface and illustrating an autobiographical overview. Second, the temporality of the story function equally influences Instagram's fit with self-promotion and branding actions. Both reasons are supported by preceding literature and will now be presented in more detail (Duffy et al., 2017; Fallon, 2014; Instagram, n.d).

4.3.1 The endurance of the grid to show artistic work

As mentioned ever so often, all interviewees told enact Win's (2014) list of social media tools as they need the online sphere to sustain as artist entrepreneurs. Although almost every participant claims to have a separate website, some only promote their work on social media and especially Instagram. Nevertheless, both kinds claimed to treat their Instagram profile surface like a webpage as it should provide an accurate overview of their talents. Hence the majority of the study participants explained to delete past postings often. These selected postings do not fit into their established overall picture anymore.

I noticed that friends of mine treated their [Instagram] profile like their webpage and were uploading and deleting pictures from there. They look at their feed to check if everything is organized. I found this very interesting and thought: True! I could delete those three, four five postings who do not fit into the whole picture. And this is also what I did in the end.

(@axel.schindler)

Also, academic research often compares the surface of any Instagram to an album, providing an overview of the user (Fallon, 2014). While it can also be compared to an autobiographical timeline, the professional background of visual artists demands to curate the content of the profile surface carefully (Duffy et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the data showed that most interviewees are deliberately rejecting to include private content in their feed. In fact, ten out of twelve artists refrain from sharing images of something other than their final work on their feed.

So, I would say, that basically my feed has only pictures of art and I do not include private content there.

(@ndcm_art)

It is now evident that the profile's spotlight shines on the objectified cultural capital of the emerging visual artist. While the section's first statement highlights the importance of curating one's Instagram profile to an all-time up to date version, the second one mentions the exclusion of private content or incorporated cultural capital on the permanent surface of his profile.

4.3.2 Temporary stories as window to private life

One of Instagram's affordances allows each story post to be revisited by users for a maximum of 24 hours before it disappears again (Instagram, n.d.). More than three-quarters of the interviewees quickly adopted this opportunity as the function's temporality allows them to share content, which is not stuck on their Instagram profile grid, offering new prospects. Following examples are given of how the story function is most commonly used among emerging visual artists:

I always had this idea that stories are your day to day, how do you call it? The records of your day today, your progress.

(@b_moura)

Epecially permanent postings I use exclusively for my work or which are related to my work.

I really use it only for my work, but my stories are more for: I am going for a walk in the woods.

(@marietheresmadani)

So of course, you can find some private content in my stories, but I never post a picture of myself on my feed.

(@linda_..steiner)

The first quotation embraces the time limit of the story function and attributes it as the main reason why it works so well to give insights into the private life of artists (and concomitant brand identity) or share incorporated cultural capital. The latter two underline the strict separation of private versus work content (objectified cultural capital) in terms of short-term stories or permanent grid postings. In general, sharing personal details with an online audience is a prominent way to establish an affinity between artist-entrepreneurs and their fans, making themselves more relatable (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Salo et al.,

2013). Furthermore, all quotations evidence once more the close relationship between the emerging visual artists' social media brand identities and their real-life and constitute paradigms for all participants.

4.3.3 Temporary stories to show work in progress

Although a close connection to the artists' lives is witnessed it is also important to note that the interviewees found more ways for the usage of the story function to deepen their follower relationships. All participants declared to share work in progress content already or expressed interest in doing so in the near future. At that stage, it is important to note that by letting the online audience behind the scenes of an artist's cultural production process, a strong bond between the two parties involved can be tied (Salo et al., 2013; Morris, 2014).

On Instagram, I definitely had more. From time to time so-called 'making off stories'. In around 10 parts on how I gild my pictures. It starts with how I cut the pieces and then really step by step. These are also on my story highlights. They are called: making off.

(@ndcm_art)

I really try to make it more often because it is well received. Because people are looking at that [Instagram stories] more often.

(@mari.asanti)

The second expert mentions the high interest of her followers in how she produces her art. The research explained that the profession of visual artists is still quite mystified among our society. The common understanding about creativity being "woven into the fabric of life itself" (Freeman, 1993, p. 36) and the absence of mandatory degrees to exercise the profession contribute to this perception (Bain, 2005; Benhamou, 2013). It can now be assumed that by making outsiders part of the cultural production process, the occupational status of the visual artist can be demystified. Filmed content about work in progress on Instagram stories allows us to see the direct transition of the artist's *incorporated* cultural capital to being *objectified* in the final work. Previously it was found that artists sometimes stick to certain stereotypes when communicating their personal brand to audiences, see a struggling artist or decadent grandeur (Freeman, 1993; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). However, the data showed that by filming the whole production process, outsiders could get a glimpse into the complex procedures, thereby illustrating the mysterious artistic world more closely, thus making stereotypical behaviour absolute.

4.4 Account-care is self-care

The last theme concentrates less on the adapted communication and online marketing steps of emerging visual artists but more on their knowledge about platform characteristics, monitoring activities, and especially their goal behind those tasks. It is assumed that by caring for their account, they are also caring for their business. Generally, the participants expressed that they often experienced difficulties when using social media.

So, yes, there are still some things I don't understand in the world of social media. How we share, but are also connected, but this is probably also a digital problem of the algorithms and not the actual people. I think that's a problem for artists.

(@b_moura)

The artist, like many others, expressed difficulties when posting on social media and further mentioned confusion about algorithms and their effects on account visibility. The finding strongly connects to Fletcher's (2008) research regarding the execution struggle of artists' performance-centred ambitions. Further, it also supports the detected conflicts of an artist's entrepreneurial status to learn about platform characteristics (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

It is no secret that a platform's affordances and the whole social media landscape are under constant construction (Duffy et al., 2017). This evolution is known as *platform fluidity* and urges artists to adapt whenever new features are introduced to further sustain in the fluid social media ecology (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Morris, 2014; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). The same understanding was found in this research as participants explained that they always have to be on the lookout for new platform features:

If you just look at the size and growth of a social media platform then you as a single interpreter and artist have to perform there as well. I understand this is highly important.

Use the features if you can.

(@maritheresmadani)

I do not recognise the platform as the king and everyone who wants to use it must follow it's instructions like sheep, but rather that you can use and say for yourself if you want to seize

it: I can go this way but I mustn't.

(@flowsofly)

While the first statement stresses the importance of the fluid social media ecology for autonomous creatives to further expand their knowledge and accounts for their professional independence as the reason behind it, the second one underlines the emerging visual artist's freedom of choice throughout the whole process. Both claims support the dominant pattern found throughout the majority of all interviews. Although various academics urge that social media users must comply with social media expansions to generate higher profile exposure (Duffy et al., 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), emerging visual artists refrain from doing so to avoid sacrificing their quality for social media's sake. Hence the pattern shows that local resources of artistic identity stir their social media communication efforts.

Again, the recent finding connects to Taylor and Littleton's (2008a) research regarding their social repertoire *money-as validation*. However, the statements showed that by caring about the correct development of their account, emerging visual artists are caring for themselves. The evolutionary process ultimately influences any action (without sacrificing artistic integrity) regarding the topics of account growth and account tidiness of emerging visual artists.

4.4.1 Let the social media account grow

Although social media reference numbers are understood to be no indicator for creative success among emerging visual artists (4.1.2 Perfect outlet for art), the participants are using some features to scatter their postings more broadly. Here it is important to note that every action taken to support channel growth is strictly within an organic framework meaning that no payment to the platforms is involved.

I think this [paid advertising on social media] has something to do with honesty. Having the arrogance to say: OK YOU HAVE TO LOOK AT MY ART! This is similar to: Eat or die. I do not want to push my content too hard but rather experience a pull from my followers. But of course, I am interested in the reach of my postings.

(@flowsofly)

The statement indicates that it is ill-reputed in the artistic community to pay for their social media reach. Nevertheless, an action that is not frowned upon is the use of hashtags. Both discoveries are applicable for the greater part of interviewees.

Are there any new hashtags I can use? Which of them could I use a little more or are there any niche hashtags?

(@marietheresmadani)

This statement evidences again the importance of staying up-to-date when tending to their account reachability within an organic context.

4.4.2 Tidy up the social media account

The emerging visual artists' professional background also determines many social media actions. Throughout the interview process, all participants explained that they do want to make their social media profile look tidy or organised to provide a clear picture of their art and so potential customers can orient themselves more easily:

I think it that is kind of nice for me to keep it organised and also things look nicer and stuff.

Because it is also the thing, I was just so you'd think in a way was like when I look at accounts that I find nice then I feel like I want to do the same, you know? Maybe it's partly for like the sales from this first impression thing that how I wanted people to perceive the stuff that I put up. ... also, it's also the thing that I don't really have a web page or portfolio, so I mainly use Instagram.

(@iustas_)

The statement explains that tidying one's Instagram account is essential to make an excellent first impression on potential customers when they access emerging visual artists' Instagram profiles. The topic of *accessibility* praises to support better user-follower relations on social media (Salo et al., 2013). Prior, it has been said that the implementation of hashtags is to expand a posting's reach. However, it is also true that they are used to group postings not only by the study's interviewees but also by Kywe et al. (2012). By grouping related posts through hashtags, it makes them more easily to find, thus more accessible. Furthermore, data evidenced the primary usage of two different kinds of hashtags, to successfully group postings:

For one thing, I increasingly use technical descriptions [hashtags]. So, hashtags that the describe the medium. For example: #PaintingOnCanvas or #AcrylicPainting, #PortraitPainting things like that.

(@linda_..steiner)

I already used my name as a hashtag way back on old photographs and old paintings, so you can find me more easily. ... I really try to stick to that on Instagram.

(@mari.asanti)

The statements exemplify which kind of hashtags were most prominent among the emerging visual artist community. On the one hand, the use of descriptive hashtags showed to be quite common among the community members. On the other hand, the use of one's own name as a hashtag was also witnessed throughout eight out of all twelve interviews.

Another Instagram characteristic in relation to tidiness is the story highlights. The feature was only introduced recently and thus points again at the importance of currency with regard to platform fluidity by Duffy et al. (2017).

When it [Instagram story highlights] was new I just thought it could be practical and look tidy and is overall not a stupid idea. Then I just thought: Might as well do this to make it more professional

(@axel.schindler)

Concluding it can be said that although artistic integrity is highly regarded within emerging visual artists, they do exhaust every opportunity on social media which is free of charge, to increase their posting reachability. Thereby the participants issued an interest in emergent techniques if they are compatible with their work.

5. Discussion

The research aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of how emerging visual artists use social media for marketing their work to circumvent the restricting gatekeeping functions of cultural institutions. Therefore, twelve expert interviews were conducted within a qualitative approach to gather fitting information (Van Audenhove, 2007). In particular, a thematic analysis must go beyond existing academic findings and expand on them to answer the stated question accordingly (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Generally, emerging visual artists' social media behaviour distinct itself from others as not only to their content of visuals but rather upon the fact that members of the group have not yet made a name of themselves in the real world. Ultimately, the previous established theoretical concepts and the derived operationalisation in connection with the study-data offered insights into the relevant topic and helped at answering the guiding research question:

How are emerging visual artists using social media marketing tools to promote their own work?

The prior chapter presented a strong bond between existing academic literature and the collected data. However, the results do not solely repeat past findings but rather expand on them. These expansions evidence that current social media marketing activities of emerging visual artists are indeed one of a kind, thus affirming the initial interest in the topic. The following discussion about the detected results will orient itself by the structure of the research's operationalisation table.

It came as no surprise that emerging visual artists vehemently use social media. Previous research found that to sustain as an artist, many have to become artist-entrepreneurs in their field and further market themselves to render economic capital (Khedher, 2014). The same was discovered during this research, as it showed that the use of social media supports emerging visual artists in reaching economic self-sufficiency. Hence the online sphere indeed offers a way to circumvent restricting gatekeepers of the cultural profession. However, the data also presented that practiced social media activities go beyond marketing duties and also include common entrepreneurial tasks of funding, sales, and distribution, as suggested by Win (2014). Platforms like Instagram or Facebook offer more opportunities than initially assumed. It is now evident that those social media outlets not only allow for spreading social and cultural capital as a form of marketing activity but also support the direct creation of economic capital.

The theme of *The emerging visual artists' social media toolbox* listed in more detail in which artist-entrepreneurs actually employ tools. Again, tight connections between the research's findings and succeeding academic literature were observed. Calcagno and Balzarin (2016) discussed the struggles of artist-entrepreneurs dealing with their performance-centred tasks in comparison to their artistic qualities. The section's sub-themes were presented in ascending order according to the number of found codes, thus indicating how prominent each tool is within the community. It was especially interesting to see that the more actions were required for executing each social media task, the less prominent the tool was. This finding indicates the same solution as Calcagno and Balzarin (2016). Thereby social media's dual character became neglected as the artists primarily used the platforms to distribute their work and themselves but did not actively interact with their followers.

What is more, the result section stated that emerging visual artists do not employ well-conceived social media marketing strategies, nor do they comply with prevailing algorithms of the online world. The finding contradicts the discussion of academics, as many (i.e.: Khedher (2015), Labrecque et al. (2011)) urge to introduce step by step schedules to communicate on social media successfully. This precision was not detected among emerging visual artists, which is accounted to the reasons of artistic integrity and their struggle to execute performance-centred tasks with their limited resources professionally. These insights answered the first sub-question: *How are emerging visual artists strategizing their social media activities to promote their own work?*

The term commercial walk of shame was introduced to best capture emerging visual artists' feelings when they understand their need to employ commercial marketing strategies. This finding overlaps with Taylor and Littleton's (2008a) research regarding the commercialisation of artistic work and social repertoires. The understanding of money-as-validation about artistic success in exchange for the sacrifice of artistic quality is deeply rooted within the community and now also applicable for emerging visual artists in relation to high social media reference numbers.

Besides the reluctance to be commercial on social media, it was also found that emerging visual artists are communicating in a silent way. The term silent relationship was used by the experts to describe their passive one-way communication as they are not actively texting their followers or asking questions. Nevertheless, the interviewees are engaging with their followers, as they gladly answer any question brought up by their online community. Instead of themselves, their audience consciously chooses to be the sender.

Their behaviour opposes Salo's et al. (2013) point of *interaction* to foster wholesome online relationships. However, the remaining activities of *accessibility*, *affinity*, *participation*, and *social identity* were all detected throughout the data. Thereby the activities' biggest difference is the degree of active engagement. Although their behaviour is perfectly understandable, it still must be mentioned that their actions work against social media's purpose. Originally, any online surrounding thrives from an opinion exchange and UGC (O'Reilly, 2005). By turning a two-way communication channel into a one-way-highway, emerging visual artists remove the unique characteristic of the online sphere.

Though the emerging visual artists expressed their confusion about the correct usage of social media marketing activities and strategies, they were simultaneously highly aware

of the benefits or restrictions of each platform. Instagram was named to be the most fitting social media outlet due to its focus on visuals, global reach, business atmosphere, and self-promotional tools. The emerging visual artists specified that the platform's grid allows the presentation of visual artwork in a flattering way. At the same time, its wide reach, and business atmosphere promotes marketing, communication, and sales activities more intensely. These understandings perfectly support the research of Duffy et al. (2017).

The data already showed that visual artists' steps of executing their social media communication are restricted by their difficulties to professionally manage entrepreneurial tasks as well as their artistic integrity, pointing at common struggles of artist-entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, it also became evident that the group is aware of the benefits of showing not only their work but also its originator. Schroeder (2010) already drew many connections between to concept of brands and the profession of visual artists. Following the second sub-question of: *"How are emerging visual artists executing their social media performance to promote their own work on social media?"* is answered.

It appears that Instagram provides a fitting platform to promote the said value of emerging visual artists specifically. All experts explained that they are not only sharing their work but also details of their personal life and character with their followers. Accordingly, they are establishing a connection between themselves, their art and their followers. By developing brand identities that are tightly connected to artistic identities, artists can communicate their cultural and social capital and distinguish themselves from competitors. These values build the core of their identity and are shared with a broad audience; previous research of Khedher (2015) already assumed such relations

However, research on artistic and brand identity claimed that many visual artists are pushed into communicating stereotypes to effectively produce an image to an audience who does not have insights into their profession (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). The mystified status of visual artists is often confronted with some degree of misunderstanding by society as the absence of degrees and the abstract concept of creativity produce a veil of confusion around the profession (Bain, 2005; Freeman, 1993). This is no necessity for emerging visual artists who use social media anymore. Instagram's story function enables users to post time-limited content, which will not affect their grid (Instagram, n.d.). This tool is used to share work behind the scenes content and snippets of the emerging visual artists' daily lives. Hence, the story function serves as a window into the life behind the final work. Artists can

now escape the uncertainty about their profession and communicate a distinct brand identity.

In terms of branding and relationship activities, academia suggests always to assess past activities to detect insufficient or misleading posts (Labrecque et al., 2011). Surprisingly the data confirmed that emerging visual artists took no such steps. Instead of evaluating past behaviour the experts explained to be more concerned about the changing platform features and the resulting implications on their accounts. In connection, the topics of account growth and tidiness became highly influential. These are pursued within an organic framework, strictly excluding any in-app purchases. This element further shows that emerging visual artists do not reflect on their social media performance in terms of reference numbers, but rather on the looks of their accounts.

At the beginning of the research paper, it was argued that academia is leaping over the category of emergent visual artists, as scholars solemnly investigate social media marketing cases of already established faces in the creative and cultural industries. Hence the circumstance of emerging visual artists favouring costless tools also be tied to the emerging visual artist's lack of economic capital. Ultimately the niche's social media marketing activities are influenced by their capital composition (as well as artistic integrity). This way the artist-entrepreneurs are forced to ignore Palmer's (1996) suggestion regarding the synthesis of brand identity and relationship marketing to achieve a developed brand.

All this considered and to answer the research question appropriately; the current findings clearly state that social media enables emerging visual artists to circumvent the institutional forces of the cultural industries. Social media allows not only to execute marketing tasks but also promotes activities related to network expansion or direct sales and distribution. Hence social media's true powers indeed offer a pathway to gain a foothold in the visual art sector, off- and online alike.

5.1 Limitations

Although the research adhered to all criteria ensuring reliability and validity across the data collection and analysis process (3.2.2 Reliability and validity), it still encountered some difficulties:

Some of these obstacles were posed by the recent COVID-19 outbreak that affected most surely every single person (European Commission, 2020). Lockdowns, strict social distancing rules, and reduced WIFI access were only some of the effects on society and partly to this research (Proschofsky, 2020). All interviews had to be conducted via phone, limiting the resulting audio quality and making it harder to gain the interviewees' full attention. However, while the previous effects were minor setbacks and could be balanced, the coronavirus also resulted in economic deficiencies, which most certainly impacted artists of any kind. Many of the interviewees mentioned a newly increased social media posting behaviour as they are now entirely dependent upon their online performance due to the absence of events during the lockdown.

Furthermore, the study concentrated on emerging visual artists who are in some way connected to the capital of Austria. The decision to focus on this geographical location came naturally due to practical reasons. First, being the researcher's current location. Second, due to existing connections to the young Viennese art scene, which made network access and expansion to gather data more accessible. This might constitute a limitation in some way as it is fair to assume that those cultural connections somewhat impact the results. However, connections among the artists still differ as some moved here to practice their profession while others were born and raised in Vienna but decided to migrate into different countries. Including study participants with shared valued and similar practices might be easier if they have one connecting thread.

5.2 Future research

Drawing on the exhibited findings, their implications, as well as the study's limitations, various suggestions for future research can be proposed:

First, while the results presented social media as an escape from cultural institutions, it was also briefly mentioned how algorithms favour certain topics compared to others. Although there is already some research regarding the complexity of algorithms by Van Dijck and Poell (2013), it was a special request of the interviewees to mention the topic of censorship on nudity since it often constraints their work. Consequently, the boundaries of social media on emerging visual artists, as well as the impact of social media ethics on artistic work, might be interesting to pursue.

Second, elaborating on the limitations; due to the COVID-19 outbreak and its resulting event cancellations, many emerging visual artists mentioned increasing their social media performance. While this was of positive impact on this research, it would also be interesting to investigate their behaviour under normal or post-corona circumstances where art exhibitions are possible.

Third, the emerging visual artists' combination of artistic values, as well as performance-centred ambitions in a social media surrounding, also offers room for academic expansion. The term artist-entrepreneur ought to merge these aspects, but throughout the result section, later, it became evident that each aspect influences social media performance. This connects to some extent with the dual leadership (on a single level) theory, which also could be worthwhile to expand in the field of emerging visual artists' social media marketing behaviour.

Lastly, the study's geographic context could be taken into consideration when expanding on the research topic. Country specific circumstances can be compared across the globe when investigating emerging visual artists' social media marketing behaviour. For example, it is advisable to concentrate on a country's diverse funding situation of the cultural industries as those potentially impact the behaviour artist-entrepreneurs.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: Interview guide

My name is Marie Lechner and I am currently finishing my master's degree in *Media and Creative Industries* at the *Erasmus University of Rotterdam*. For my concluding thesis I would like to gain a greater understanding in how emerging visual artists market themselves in the social media sphere, promoting their work online. I am particularly interested in any activities related to your social media appearance plus your aim and thoughts behind the actions.

First of all, I would like to thank you in advance for being a part of my research and participating in this interview. I will now explain the rights you have as an interviewee:

The interview will take about 30-45 minutes, during this time you may take a break or stop the interview, just let me know. Moreover, you are entitled to discontinue the interview at any point if you wish to do so. Also, there are now obligations to answer all questions. You can tell me at any time if you would like to skip a question or repeat and alter a previous statement. Generally, there are not right or wrong answers, just take your time and whatever comes to your mind perfectly mirrors your perception. Please tell me if there are any misunderstandings or confusions throughout the interview so I can clarify my intentions.

For my research I won't need any personal information, however, I would like to mention your social media handle, number of your current Instagram followers, as well as the number of your past exhibitions. Would this be alright, or should I use an alias?

Before we start: do you have any questions? Finally, I would now like to know if you are ok with me recording this interview? Thank you very much, we will now start.

To begin with, I would like to know some things about you.

Section 1: Interviewee details and social media usage

How many exhibitions featuring your creative work did you have in the past?

What is that you want to do in the future? (Work related of course)

Are you using social media? (How many channels or profiles do you have? On what platforms?)

Would you describe yourself as more of an extroverted or introverted person? (Do you perceive any personal obstacles related to posting on social media?)

Now we are more going into detail of what image you try to create of yourself in an online environment.

Section 2: Social media marketing strategy

For what purpose are you using your channels? (What, do you want to show with your social media communication?)

What is it that you try to tell with your work?

Are your work and your social media communication related? (Do they match? How so?)

Are you trying to comply with certain criteria, say stereotypes? (How would/Could you label yourself?)

Are you trying to stand out? (How so? What online techniques/tools are you using?)

Are you showing your followers how your talents develop over time? (Are you deleting past postings which are not reflecting your current image?)

Are you trying to make yourself more relatable for outsiders? (Are you showing yourself “behind the scenes”, meaning your work process?)

Do you share anything personal or intimate? (How exactly do you do that?)

Do you find it easy to share on social media? (Are you struggling to share on social media?)

How do you try to work with the mechanics of the platforms?

What differences do you perceive between the platforms?

Besides the final image I am wondering what steps, tools and tasks you’re taking to convey the image online.

Section 3: Communication execution

Are you differentiating your behaviour according to each channel? (Why? How? On what grounds?)

How do you integrate changes of the platforms into your behaviour? (i.e.: Instagram introducing a new posting format)

Do you match your posts visually/caption wise/ hashtag? How exactly?

What are you doing to increase your visibility online? (Do you have a public account? Do you use popular hashtags? Do you tag more prominent accounts? Are you cooperating with other accounts?)

Are those activities to expand your followership? Do you aim at expanding your followership?

How would you describe your relationship with your current followers?

What relationship would you like to have?

How are you talking/chatting with your followers (to achieve this relationship)?

Are you letting your followers be a part of your work/production process?

What parts of your tasks/steps are you showing them? (Are you doing this on all your social media channels? What tools do you use?)

Besides the observing role are you letting your followers be an active part of your work? (Are you actively seeking their opinion? (why?) Are they approaching you?)

Are you integrating their input into your work? Are you integrating it into assisting tasks? (i.e.: PR, Finance, etc.)

Now we are already coming to our last section, we will discuss your monitoring efforts and how you deal with feedback.

Section 4: Brand image assessment

Are you monitoring your social media activities?

Are you monitoring crowd reactions regarding to your postings?

What do you do if you observe any misinterpretation of your audience's perspective of your work and your desired social media presence?

How do you deal with negative/positive feedback?

Do you make changes according to your observations?

7.2 Appendix B: Consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Marie Lechner

Friedlgasse 48/12 1190 Vienna AUSTRIA

marie.n.lechner@gmail.com

+43 664 554 0671

DESCRIPTION:

You¹ are invited to participate in a research about the social media marketing activities of emerging visual artists. The purpose of the study is to understand what tools emerging visual artists apply to communicate their personal brand online to further gain a foothold in the visual art sector. By undertaking online marketing activities, it is assumed that the group tries to circumvent the restricting role of cultural institutions gatekeeping the entrance into the cultural and creative industry. Thus, the research aims at understanding how emerging visual artists take matters into their own hands and promote themselves directly to an online audience.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to social media behaviour and concomitant marketing activities with a heightened focus on self-branding and relationship maintenance.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information [such as social media handles] not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym or a more general identification only mentioning age and gender, etc.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

¹ In the case of minors, informed consent must be obtained from the parents or other official carers. They will have to sign this form.

