

**Title:** Brushing Profits: Unveiling the Wall Artists' Journey of Selling Creativity on Etsy.

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**Course code:** CC4008

**Date:** 14 June 2023

**Word count:** 21867

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## 1. Introduction

The advancement of e-commerce platforms has transformed the way in which artists sell products. In contemporary digital transformation, online marketplaces such as Etsy have become a favoured avenue for artists and crafters to exhibit and market their handwrought products to an international audience (Blanchflower 2016; Dorie, et al, 2017; Luckman, 2013). In the past twelve months the phrase "wall art" was searched for on average 40591 times a month in the UK (eRank,2022) and 109830 times a month in the US (b, eRank, 2022). The underlying inquiry presumes that interest from the public in wall art influences and informs the strategies applied by artists to produce, market, and sell their artworks. Therefore, this provided the impetus for the exploration of "How do artists sell their wall art on Etsy?" (eRank, 2022, b, eRank, 2022). Consequently, the following research focuses on the established e-commerce platform Etsy, which is a platform for crafts and artwork.

The research aimed to gain insights into the strategies and techniques artists apply to market and sell their products on Etsy. Specifically, the researcher explored how artists preserved the authenticity of their art, marketing strategies, customer engagement, and relationships, which contribute to the success of artists selling wall art on Etsy. The emphasis was on wall art, denoting artworks specifically crafted for residential settings and intended for clients' dwellings. Consequently, artists selling artworks like prints, illustrations, and original art were interviewed.

This thesis is academically relevant because it contributes to the growing literature on the relevance of crafters producing authenticity for their audience due to a desire for a more authentic experience as a form of self-identification (Thurnell, 2019). Thurnell (2019) and Koontz (2010) proffer that authenticity is a crucial factor in the success of small businesses and crafters in creative industries. The objective of this thesis is to provide an understanding of the significance of authenticity in the digital epoch by exploring how artists leverage Etsy to exhibit and sell their handmade products.

Moreover, this research is socially relevant because it sheds light on the evolving nature of vocational and employment opportunities for artists and crafters. By providing insights into the strategies and techniques that artists are employing to succeed on Etsy, this thesis could benefit aspiring artists and crafters to develop their own marketing and sales strategies and prevail in the competitive digital marketplace.

In summary, this thesis aspired to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the factors that can contribute to wall artists' success on Etsy.

## **2. Theory and previous research**

### **2.1 Authenticity in the Crafts and Online Selling**

#### **2.1.1 Defining Authenticity**

According to Koontz (2010), consumers are looking for genuine or true products also known specifically as authentic products. Authenticity has been connected to terms such as "real" culture, which is the value judgement which producers and consumers according to Koontz (2010) and Adorno (Paddison, 2004) assert on objects that they deliberate to be genuine. Koontz (2010) suggests that the procedure of constructing and defining authenticity starts with the premise of otherizing and traditionalizing. Otherizing concerns form an ingroup versus an outside group who do not possess the authentic item (Koontz, 2010). While traditionalizing rests on creating a shared agreement between the producer and the consumer's perception of the past, thus creating nostalgia (Koontz, 2010). According, to Blanchflower (2016), producers who create strong brands can improve their product's appearance by being authentic, which implicitly interrelates with the concept of Otherizing in Koontz's (2010) work through the creation of "us and them". Blanchflower's (2016) interviewee indicated that for a product on Etsy to be authentic, one of the requirements would be handmade by the producer. The interviewee demonstrated contempt for mass-produced items. Thus, Blanchflower concluded that mass production was considered inauthentic and did not align with the consumer's definition of an authentic product (2016).

Koontz (2010) investigated how businesses construed authenticity through the otherization and traditionalization of their products and how consumers interpreted authenticity based on their perceptions. Koontz (2010) noted that depending on the size of the business would determine which of the two abovementioned strategies the business owners would apply to create a product that would be perceived as authentic by consumers. Koontz (2010) cites that identity forms a significant part of authenticity as consumers will purchase products that they contrive as authentic to their principles. As a result, producers market their products to consumers based on these senses of identity (Koontz, 2010).

Koontz (2010) specified that large companies applied traditionalization, where they utilized the name and age of the companies to act as a signifier of authenticity. For example,

Chanel or any other luxury brand that has been around for a few decades, their names are the signifier of the quality and authenticity of the product to which consumers subscribe.

On the other hand, otherizing has been applied to smaller businesses that tend to leverage their status of being an outsider for the legitimation of their business (Koontz, 2010). Often, artists and patrons claim to represent authentic cultures, or they claim to be beyond the mainstream.

The process of artists as outsiders were discussed by Alexander and Bowler (2021) in their paper on *Contestation in aesthetic fields: Legitimation and legitimacy struggles in outsider art*, where they discuss how outsider artists appeared to shun monetary gains and reflect authentic art as the artist is perceived by society as a creative genius who often did not progenerate from art institutions or have histories of mental illness (Alexander & Bowler, 2021). Once outsider artists were discovered, they were often legitimized in the mainstream art world as “authentic” due to their lack of formal training. This conception converges with Bourdieu’s theory of “the loser wins”, signifying the artist's abjuration of the notions of striving for pecuniary value and welcomes apathy in this paradigm (Alexander & Bowler, 2021, p5). Nevertheless, Alexander and Bowler (2021) also stated that for the most part, the loser loses, whereby artists do not win by the rejection of pecuniary value rather they are disadvantaged by being outside the artworld as this hinders their ability to find success through their art.

Alane Fine (2003) advances the assertion of Alexander and Bowler (2021) asserting that aesthetic authenticity of the self-taught artist lies in their distinctive selfhood that remains outside the mainstream, which is perceived to be contaminated by capitalism. Fine (2003) argues that authenticity lies in being able to pinpoint differences as well as providing an unfacilitated experience. He cites that the artists do not contend with their identity as authentic artists. Instead, it is the art world's battle to legitimize their status. Fine (2003) notes that outsider artists tend to lie outside the boundaries of the art market and that the value of their art lies in the biographies within their creations.

However, it would be remiss not to mention that the classification of how the craft community have demarcated authenticity has not been well documented (Chhabra, 2005). Chhabra (2005) proceeded to endeavour and examine how vendors delineated crafts as authentic. The discoveries of Chhabra's (2005) quantitative study were:



Approximately 47% of the vendors illustrated that the producers were the determinants of authenticity in terms of production, 21% were of the opinion that vendors were the determinants, and 9% of the vendors indicated that the consumer dictated the authenticity (Chhabra, 2005, p69).

When Chhabra (2005) asked vendors how they defined authenticity, most vendors cited a connection to the past and Scottish traditions. Chhabra (2005) discovered that within the crafters who specialized in Scottish traditions, there was no differentiation in how the crafters defined authenticity. Since, they all agreed on the fact that the crafted article should be accurate to the historical era from which the crafted object was disseminated.

### **2.1.2 Authenticity in Relation to Mass Production**

In the interpretation of Adornos' work by Max Paddison (2004), he inferred that authenticity was underlined by value judgments with regards to the originality of the work. Adorno also conveyed that authentic music was only possible if it avoided commodification of the mass markets hence the avoidance of mass production (Paddison, 2004). Adorno argued that modern society had left restricted amount of time to actively engage with art thus ensuring that people avoid authentic culture due to the amount of time it would take to actively engage with the artwork. This was echoed by Alexander who describes Adorno's theory as such; "Authentic art would sharpen their minds, but the workers do not seek out authentic art, because they are too exhausted from their work to attack authentic art with the vigour it demands and so the cycle continues" (Alexander,2020, p32). However, Moore's (2012) work provided a disagreement between Adorno and Walter Benjamin on the concept of authenticity being destroyed by reproduction. Benjamin thought reproducibility had a democratizing effect and allowed for new meanings to emerge through reproduction. While Adorno disagreed and said that Benjamin had placed too much faith in the Proletariat's ability to actively engage with artistic creations, as Adorno thought the Proletariat was looking for standardized art rather than serious art, which had no standardization.

However, Walter Benjamin (2018) contributed other thoughts on the reproducibility of artworks through photography which he contrived as the destruction of aura in artworks as copies could not convey the spatial context therefore rendering the copy meaningless. In contradiction to this, Latour, and Lowe (2011) argue against Benjamin's assessment as they

deduced that a “migration of aura” could occur through the implementation of copies which would increase the value of the original.

In the article *Joy in labour*, Krugh (2014) mentioned that an assembly line should be created by the artist to improve productivity, however, this could lead to criticism, as it goes against the spirit of handmade products. Mass production goes against the authenticity of hand-crafted products as it has lost its novelty. The inherent ease of reproducibility and the discontinuation of hand craftsmanship leads to the erasure of the novelty of the object. Therefore, embodying the significance of the maker in an object perceived novelty (Krugh, 2014). Etsy describes items that can be sold on their platform as: "Handmade items are items made and/or designed by you, the seller." (Etsy.com, n.d.). Etsy also stated that creativity is valuable when crafting a unique product because this embodies the spirit of handmade products. Etsy also refers back to its policy of connecting sellers to buyers as crucial to this process. This criterion demonstrates that items need to be created by the producers and should either fulfil creativity to produce the item or the products need to be made by hand and not be reproducible.

### **2.1.3 Authenticity and Crafts**

Thurnell (2019) notes that there has been a resurgence of desire for handcrafted products that are deemed authentic. According to Thurnell (2019), the inclination for a more authentic artisanal product emanates from a yearning to go back to postmodern society. Thurnell (2019) concludes that this has led to an upsurge in crafts, as individuals seek connection to producers as they become dissatisfied with homogenous, standardized, mass-produced goods. Thurnell (2019) mentions that this is a symptomology of dissatisfaction with the “malaises of modernity”. Thurnell (2019) suggests that the return to crafts is rooted in the desire of individuals to possess authentic products that provide them with a sense of identity. The re-emergence of authenticity is not a new concept; as stated in Thurnell (2019), during intervals of change, society seeks to find authentic experiences or products to reduce the feeling of alienation, malaises, and meaninglessness. Consequently, it represents the individual's desire to be productive and significant within their social circles.

Blanchflower (2016) and Luckman (2013) cite that the emergence of mass production led to a demand for crafted products. In her study, Blanchflower (2016) posits that the unique consumption experience that the item provides because of its perceived novelty plays a role in

this demand. Blanchflower (2016) further elaborates that craft markets like Etsy are by no means a new phenomenon, rather, the practice was diminished due to the rise of the industrial revolution and the increased popularity of branded mass-produced products. However, Blanchflower (2016) argues that with the rise of the information age, promoted the desire to return to “mom and pop” business models, which came into fruition through platforms like Etsy. Thus, Blanchflower (2016) and Luckman (2013) implicitly inferred that a resurgence of handmade crafts in the information age is occurring.

Both Luckman (2015) and Thurnell (2019) reason that individuals are enthralled with the concept of crafting due to individuals contriving that the authenticity of crafts is redemption against the caustic nature of capitalism. Luckman (2015; 2013) further states that handmade products are perceived to be authentic in a society which the individual feels is inauthentic. The feeling of anomie and concerns of modernism deskilling workers is a traditional sociological concern (Thurnell, 2019; Luckman, 2013). Thus, crafts are seen to assert control over an individual’s personal experiences while also providing the individual with a sense of identity (Thurnell, 2019, Luckman, 2013).

Crafters are the progenitors of authenticity, as Thurnell (2019) astutely notes that items are unable to “speak for themselves”. Hence through a narrative plot, crafters imbue handmade products with an aura of authenticity (Thurnell, 2019). However, Luckman (2013) and Fine (2003) state that the handmade item provides a sense of nostalgia through connection to the crafter, and Luckman (2013) suggests that this is the element that Etsy has applied to the online platform, which makes this company successful.

Thurnell (2019) then concluded that there are six modes for creating authenticity, which are procedural, material, geographical, temporal, oppositional and biographical. Authenticity is created by the materials and processes used to create a final product (Thurnell ,2019). In contrast, geographical and temporal authenticity refers to the region and period in which the product is made traditionally (Luckman 2020; Thurnell ,2019). Whereas oppositional and biographical leaned into the narratives that crafters would create. Crafters tended to exhibit contempt for mass-produced items and considered their craft to be outside the mainstream culture (Thurnell ,2019). The crafters doubled down on this by representing the craft as an expression of themselves and their narratives. Thus, these concepts create the aura of authenticity for handmade products (Thurnell ,2019).

In addition, Luckman, and Andrews (2020; 2015 b) and Krugh (2014) indicated there was tension regarding what constitutes handmade goods. Thus, both scholars agree that there is a limitation on the amount that a crafter can produce. However, both scholars suggest that production lines could potentially be applied while preserving the authenticity of crafts if the crafter still stated that all products yielded were handmade by an individual as well as remembering their community (Luckman, 2020). Luckman and Andrews, (2020) crafters mentioned that the authenticity of crafts is contrived from being handmade and that they often felt pressure to compete with mass-produced items that did not bear any marks of the crafter such as hammer marks. However, scholars made use of Veblen's (2018) work where they expressed that handcrafted items could provide both the crafter and the consumer with a "potential power" due to it providing a sense of identity (Luckman & Andrews, 2020; Luckman, 2013). The authenticity of crafts has also been addressed as a counterculture, where movement away from fast fashion and exploitative labour practices have led to a desire to understand where products are being produced (Luckman, 2020).

The authenticity of crafts has also increased as analogue has become more prevalent within daily life (Luckman, 2013). Luckman (2013) states that she observed an emergence of her students electing to draw their concept rather than make use of images from the internet. She mentioned that this exhibited a rising interest in crafts. Fiona Hackney (2006) suggested that the increased notoriety of crafts in the media is just the latest demonstration of the malaise of modernity and an attempt by individuals to assert control over the human experience in an ever-changing social context.

The final consideration for authenticity in the crafts was providing how scholars perceive and define the concept of crafts. According to Howard Becker (2008, p273). "a body of knowledge and skill which can be used to produce useful objects.". While other scholars have posited definitions such as human expression and culture to how the product was made (Fariello, 2011; Risatti, 2009). Hence this reflects that the authenticity of crafts is deeply tied to their creator, material, temporal, and geographical context for their originality.

## **2.2 Artists as Sellers**

### **2.2.1. A History of Selling Art Online and their Makers**

The conceptualisation of selling online was construed as early as the 1960s when scholars suggested that consumers would conduct online purchases from retailers. In this instance, scholars posited the consumers would be enabled to purchase in a digital space which would then direct their order to the warehouse of this store (Blanchflower, 2016; Blanchflower and Hodges, 2016; Doddy & Davidson, 1967). However, the method for selling art online only came to maturity in the late-90s during the dot.com economic bubble and managed to survive the burst of this bubble in the 2000s (Adam, 2014; Blanchflower, 2016; Doherty, & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Sidorova, 2019). However, the online market was relegated to the side lines as traditional art markets did not want to continue with selling online after the bubble burst (Stallabrass, 2010). The failure of the Art Net to launch was suggested to be the lack of aesthetic appreciation of the work, which has since changed due to increased quality of the digital art that can be produced online today (Stallabrass, 2010).

Scholars indicate online art markets have evolved from a mechanism for selling artworks and have developed into a phenomenon within the art world, which has become its' own art market entity. Sidorova (2019) and An and Cerasi (2017) further posit that online art markets are restructuring who and where art is purchased. Hence, it is reshaping the art world and creating a democratizing effect. It is observed that this is the case concerning who has access to art (Rani, 2017). Since the 2000s, the art market online has boomed (Sidorova, 2019), with Hiscox Online Trade Report (2019) reporting a 9.8% growth in the online art market in 2019. The Hiscox report (2019) provided data suggesting that 75% of respondents in 2019 mentioned that they had purchased art from an artist and that respondents had discovered the artist through social media platforms. However, the report also indicated that respondents tended to use social media platforms to track and discover artists (Hiscox, 2019). It was further iterated by 55% of respondents in 2019 that artist's brands were crucial for making decisions to purchase artwork from a particular artist, with 79% of respondents indicating that the artists' credibility was a corresponding factor for the acquisition of artwork (Hiscox, 2019).

In 2021 Art Basel report indicated that Covid had a negligible increase in purchasing art online, however this has led to the players in the art market conveying that the future is a hybrid where both physical and online transactions will occur concurrently (McAndrew, 2022).

### **2.2.2. The Opportunities and Threats of Selling Art Online**

According to Klawitter and Hargittai (2018) interviewees, one of the advantages of using Etsy's platform was to ensure credibility of using this e-commerce platform as well as assistance with search engine optimization. This guarantees the visibility of the artist and sellers on the Etsy platform. Scholars suggest that independent artists can benefit from using online platforms to market their work. Klawitter and Hargittai (2018) also argue that the artist of online stores tends to be motivated to engage with their audience to gain sales. Moreover, their research discovered that algorithmic skills are vital for the online seller and that lacking these skills could impede their relational economics (Klawitter & Hargittai, 2018). Klawitter and Hargittai (2018, p 16) state: "Despite how crucial such knowledge is to their craft, many creative entrepreneurs still struggle with proprietary systems and lack the know-how to use them in beneficial ways.". Thus, they state that algorithmic skills are invaluable to aiding success with marketing (Klawitter & Hargittai, 2018).

Etsy offers sellers a substantial international base of consumers, which also means they do not have to devote effort into building up their client base (Dorie, et al, 2017).

Regarding seller satisfaction, Dorie, and colleagues (2017) stated that 4% of producers mentioned positive aspects of Etsy, while 99% of sellers expressed dissatisfaction with the platform. The reasons for this dissatisfaction ranged from the loss of income due to fraud from other sellers to the termination of stores along with no responsiveness for the reason of the closure of their stores (Dorie, et al, 2017). Further crafters mentioned that they were moving away from online platforms due to competition and the fear that clients were not going to purchase their products because of shipping fees associated with purchasing a product from outside their geographical area hence making it less favourable to have a store online (Luckman, 2020). Scholars suggest that one of the numerous opportunities provided for selling is Etsy which provides a decentralized community for creatives to sell their products to a larger audience. As a result, this allowed traditional gatekeepers to be circumvented to gain access to the art market (Alexander, 2020; Luckman 2013; Novaković, 2021; Pace, et al, 2013).

Blanchflower (2016) stated concerns that as the number of “inauthentic” sellers increased this would diminish Etsy credibility of authentically handmade products. The fear of a loss of authenticity was echoed by Thurnell (2019) who stated that his participants feared that as larger institutions started to develop their own craft beer, that it would lead to these larger companies co-opting their authenticity.

Furthermore, Munro and O’Kane (2022) concluded that handmade products acted as a totemic item, which provided the consumer with a sense of authenticity and identity. However, consumers would not have obtained this from an "inauthentic mass-market" producer. Therefore, they articulated that the artisanal economy is established on the exchange of pecuniary value. It is further differentiated based on a relationship of trust and human connection with the seller.

Novaković (2021) and Rani, (2017) argue online platforms provide greater visibility to artists. She also highlighted that the online market gives another income stream for artists as the online art market continues to increase in popularity. Novaković (2021) argues that the online art market has the potential to surpass the traditional art market if it continues its present trajectory. Hence it could potentially provide artists with a growing opportunity for selling their wall art and exposure for their products when entering the art market.

## **2.3 Relation with Audience and Clients**

### **2.3.1 Building Consumer Loyalty in E-Commerce: The Foundations of Artists'**

#### **Relationships with Clients**

Etsy has an international client base and hence it supplies the best benefit to the distribution of the product for the artist and the consumers (Krugh, 2014; Luckman, & Andrew, 2020). However, most crafters rely on social networks and word of mouth to gain sales for their businesses, demonstrating that personal communication is still highly prized within this industry (Luckman, 2020). Crafters tend to provide discounts to clients to receive more clientele. This interaction tends to create tension as the crafter still needs to earn an income (Luckman, 2020).

In Solga’s (2013) book, she conveys that audiences online have a conglomeration of options to select from, hence; artists, according to Solga, require a brand to define themselves from their competitors. Solga (2013) suggests that the use of meaning-making has significance for gaining sales online as clients seek a deep emotional connection to the work that they are

purchasing online. Solga (2013) argues that sellers need to be using social media and telling their clients stories surrounding their art which she claims will organically drive sales to their sites.

Solga (2013) suggests that when relating to clients on Etsy, sellers should follow their customers' profiles as this will provide invaluable information on the customer, as well as build up the sellers' social network, which Etsy encourages as part of the mission to connect makers with the buyer. This was further stated by Blanchflower and Hodges (2015), who argue that due to the format of the Etsy platform, the policy of reciprocity extends to the client and seller relationship as both are seen to assist the other through the provision of a quality handmade product whereas the customer aids the seller through word of mouth and leaving reviews on the site.

Scholars suggest that due to the information age customers are able to move freely on the internet and so often do not have strong connections to the sellers (Solga, 2013; Verona, & Prandelli, 2002). However, to counteract this dilemma, scholars suggest applying methods such as creating affiliation to the seller brand, thus, creating brand loyalty (Verona, & Prandelli, 2002). Affiliation is produced by creating a sense of connection to the seller (Verona, & Prandelli, 2002). Another strategy when it comes to client relations is the lock-in method, which entails creating a customer base which is loyal to the company. Thus, they would feel a sense of loss if they were to switch. This method can be encouraged through the selling of complementary products that the customers may desire (Verona, & Prandelli, 2002). Scholars suggest that most companies use an amalgamation of these two methods, and they argue that the main focus for sellers should be on creating trust with their customers through personable relationships (Verona, & Prandelli, 2002). The significance of trust online today was further iterated as a means of gaining sales by allowing consumers some autonomy with the use of their data to how other consumers' interactions with the seller have been conducted (Urban, et al, 2009; Geissler, 2001). Reviews on sites and the seller's credibility through the number of sales they have concluded have become deeply intertwined with how trustworthy the customer finds the seller (Urban, et al, 2009; Yoon, et al, 2008). Geissler (2001) also mentioned that the use of contact information on the site also inspired trust and the likelihood that a customer would purchase from the store.

Razaq and colleagues (2022) studied Etsy and discovered that sellers experienced pressure to sell more while the nature of their handmade products meant that sellers had to wait for customers to say what kind of customization they desired for their products (Razaq et al,



2022). Further pressure has been situated on sellers to reply to customers within 24 hours as Etsy rates the success of their stores based on this interaction with their clients (Razaq et al, 2022). Razaq and colleagues' (2022) research participants also mentioned how they dealt with clients who were dissatisfied with the service they had been rendered by suggesting they would provide future compensation to the client or apologize for the inconvenience.

Geissler's (2001) research concerns online sellers had on capturing client's attention. The sellers perceived the consumer as impatient, and they contrived having about 5- 30 seconds to capture the customer's attention. Concerning their customers, sellers also emphasized the importance of search engine optimization (SEO). According to one respondent, this process allows the store to aid customers in deciding whether to shop there or not. The participant also said to conceive of this process as a mall. The seller is trying to attract the consumer by branding and name.

Yoon and colleagues (2008) mention that the relationship between sellers and customers is predicted to become more conversational and personable. The results of Yoon and colleagues' study was that customers valued communication through means of email and that the use of rewards improved the relationship between sellers online and customers (Yoon, et al, 2008). They also discovered that interacting with clients online improved the potential of purchasing from the store due to the customer perceiving that a relationship has been formed (Yoon, et al, 2008). However, their study highlighted that customer did not like preferential treatment as these created conditions of negative reciprocity, thus potentially causing the loss of a valuable client (Yoon, et al, 2008). The study also found that consumers valued how interactive the website was due to the perception that it displayed input from the seller into the client's experience. Thus, it formed the basis on which the relationship was produced and whether or not the client was willing to give their loyalty to the company (Yoon, et al, 2008).

### **2.3.2. Participatory Culture Methods**

Participatory culture can be defined as follows for the purposes of this master's thesis: "1. relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, 2. strong support for creating and sharing creations with others" (Jenkins, 2009, p 5). Jenkins argues that participatory culture is shaping the media we consume. Thus, consumers are actively engaging in the process of creating, by either participating themselves or providing feedback to the creator (Jenkins, 2009).

Participatory culture can be recognized in an online activity where members of formal and informal communities interact with one another and share their ideals (Blanchflower, 2016).

Massanari (2015) argues that the birth of the internet in the 90s provided people with a space to engage in the media they consume. Furthermore, she attests to the fact that it is not a new phenomenon, instead, it bears a resemblance to “fanzines, underground publications” in the 1940s, which promoted the concept of talking back where people could discuss and criticize the media they consumed (Massanari, 2015, p. 7). Massanari (2015) discussed further that participatory platforms rely on their users to create content. However, this has been criticized by other scholars as exploitative as the platform owners may sell the consumer's data as a way of understanding demographics within the population (Massanari, 2015; van Dijck, 2013).

Burgess and Jones (2020) posit that participatory culture has become invaluable for brands by creating brand communities that identify with certain products and are often encouraged to create their content in conjunction with gaming studios. Brand communities are significant to this process as they are formed of consumers who share relationships and provide advice to one another. This also creates a niche of consumers who identify with the brand and other consumers, which manifests itself in the identity and culture of the consumer who purchases the item (Burgess and Jones, 2020). These consumers can then create other products based on mutual enjoyment of a brand or TV series, which is often referred to as fan art or fiction depending on the niche, thus demonstrating the tangible manifestations of participatory culture (Burgess and Jones, 2020).

An investigation by Lüneburg (2018) on highbrow art and participatory culture analysed the effect of allowing consumers to actively engage in the creation of artworks with the artists. She argued that participation would remove the hierarchal boundaries between artists and their audience (Lüneburg, 2018). They discovered that their community influenced both the artwork produced and how the artist negotiated how to artistically integrate comments into their artworks: while maintaining authenticity (Lüneburg, 2018). Lüneburg (2018) also stated that this provided the artist with a sense of community that would aid in the conceptualization of ideas.

### **3. Methods and Data**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter on methods will outline the methodology through which the researcher conducted the data analysis. Methodological consideration plays a vital function in the structuring of data analysis for this thesis. This methodology chapter provides a detailed overview of the Research Design; Data Collection, research units of Analysis and sampling; Operationalization; Analysis; and the Validity and Reliability of data. Additionally ethical considerations are discussed ensuring the highest level of transparency for this master's thesis.

A qualitative method was employed for thirteen semi-structured interviews to assess how wall artists sell on Etsy. Overall, the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews provided a thorough and effective methodology for the collection and analysis of this master's thesis. The following section will provide a detailed description of the procedures and methods that were adhered to ensure that this master's thesis is valid and transparent.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The following thesis employed a non-probability purposive sample of wall artists on Etsy, per established social research methodologies (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013). It was an inductive approach that guided the research for this master's thesis. This thesis aimed to explore how wall artists on Etsy sell their handmade crafts through various strategies and methods to stimulate sales.

Hence, thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary method of data collection as they provided an in-depth and idiographic understanding of strategies that artists employed in their online stores (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013). The purpose of this thesis is to elucidate the reasons why some artists elected strategies to promote purchases from their stores, along with how artists preserved the authenticity of their art, the marketing strategies they employed, and how they managed customer engagement and relationships.

The interview guide aligned with the theoretical framework, ensuring rigorous and systematic data collection (See Appendix B). As part of this master's thesis, thirteen interviews were conducted, using an interview guide to ensure that they could be compared and operationalized in relation to the research objectives.

In accordance with the procedures for this thesis, interviews were required to be between 41 minutes to 1 hour and 46 minutes in duration. The interviewer provided follow-up questions to elicit comprehensive responses from the interviewees. While the method employed in this study may not be universally applicable to all contexts, it facilitates idiographic descriptions. This was achieved by analysing the social milieu of female artists selling on Etsy (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013; Luckman, 2013, 2015; Swain, 2018). The social milieu was observed through in-depth interviews and iterative analysis of the transcriptions, permitting patterns to emerge in the collected data (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012).

Furthermore, the presented dataset was derived exclusively from female participants. This methodological decision aligned with past research, which indicated Etsy's female-dominated nature. Scholars mentioned percentages of females utilizing the platform to sell their crafts were 83% (Razaq, et al, 2022, p.425) and 90.7% (Pace, et al, 2013). Additionally, Luckman (2013, 2015) employed an entirely female sample. The deliberate selection of completely female participants was navigated by the intention to provide the perspectives of the majority on Etsy. The researcher employed female participants to achieve a comparable sample and ensure the internal validity of this study.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Research Units of Analysis and Sampling**

This thesis applied a nonprobability random purposive sample. The following sample was selected due to the method enabling the selection of rich data, which was required to address the research question and objectives of the master's thesis (Bryman, 2012).

Having come up with the sampling method, one main sampling criteria was adopted. First, the interviewees are required to have at least owned a store on ETSY for more than two years. This criterion was observed, due to the artists' existent familiarity with selling on e-commerce platforms, particularly Etsy, in this instance.

For the data collection, the participants were approached through several media outlets, including Reddit, Facebook, and Instagram. The researcher provided posts to both Reddit and Facebook forums relating to Etsy and art-related forums to ensure that artists who sell on Etsy had a high potential of viewing these posts. However, a more direct approach was applied to Instagram, where the researcher reached out to artists individually. The method applied to locating artists using Instagram was optimized, by using the Etsy search engine to find the artist and then approach the artist on Instagram. The researcher also looked into the potential of using

the Etsy community platform for the location of respondents. However, the forum did not allow for the posting of research-related topics. Hence, the above-mentioned strategies were applied to gain interviews with wall artists on Etsy.

The respondents came from several of the abovementioned platforms: 3 came from the Reddit platform, 1 respondent from Facebook and 9 from direct messaging from Instagram. The sample is made up of women from 8 geographical locations; France (1 respondent), Netherlands (3 respondents), Sweden (1 respondent), The United States of America (2), the United Kingdom (1), Italy (1), Canada (3), and India (1) (See Appendix A). Hence a more Eurocentric perspective of selling on Etsy is taken into account in this research and should be reported for as the geographical loci of the artists affected their perspective's about selling their wall art on Etsy. A female sample was selected since the majority of vendors on the Etsy platform are females, and this was then reflected in the sample that was collected (Luckman, 2013, 2015; Pace, et al, 2013; Razaq, et al, 2022). The interviewer for this master's thesis conducted all interviews via Zoom video calls. The interviewer endeavoured to follow the protocol surrounding the structure of semi-structured interviews. Etsy sellers were asked open-ended questions from the interview guide to promote discussion (See Appendix B). When further information from the interviews was required, follow-up questions were provided based on the individual artists in the interview. The transcriptions of all interviews were transcribed by the interviewer personally with the aid of Zoom transcripts which were provided by the platform.

Due to the project using wall art owners on the Etsy platform, it was elected by the researcher to anonymize all participants to ensure that no risk to the participants would occur by taking part in this MA thesis. Interviews thus far have lasted around 41 minutes to a 1 hour and 46 minutes.

During the collection phase, a limitation arose due to the reluctance of several artists who expressed that they did not want to participate in online interviews; but expressed their willingness to provide email interviews which thus informed the preliminary understanding of this topic (Abrahams, 2008). This occurrence was intriguing as upon conducting additional inquiry it was discovered that another researcher had also encountered artists who preferred email interviews rather than online. Consequently, further study into this occurrence would be of interest (Abrahams, 2008).

### 3.4 Operationalization

The researcher inferred deductively based on previous research, which was explained, in the theoretical framework. This previous research led to the conceptualization of three macro themes: Authenticity in selling crafts online, Artists as sellers (threats and opportunities), and Relations with the audience and the client. These themes were then operationalized into three interview topics with questions pertaining to these themes.

In order to explore the relation between Authenticity in selling crafts online. This concept containing three dimensions were identified. The first one is Defining Authenticity, which provides a sociological perspective of defining authenticity, and how authenticity is defined in the crafts community. This will allow for understanding of how artists create handmade crafts, which people perceive as genuine. This synthesizes into the second concept of authenticity in relation to mass production, The application of reproduction stymies the aura of artworks and crafts as it has not been handmade. This concept will enable further understanding of the seller's motivations for selling their artwork on Etsy. This element will uncover if there is a feeling of discontent among artists, where mass production is concerned and their perceptions toward why they opt to create handmade products. This section led to the final concept of Authenticity in the crafts. This concept considers how crafters create authenticity for consumers through several strategies, such as narratives. This will help to understand the seller's strategy in connection to their business model elected to the branding they chose to apply. Thurnell (2019) discusses how crafters' narratives are utilized to create authenticity in their craft. The application of authenticity in crafts will promote conversations on the motivations that the artist had for choosing Etsy. It should also advance discussions over how they chose their strategy, as well as what they consider to be authentically handmade.

In order to explore the position of Artists as Sellers, two dimensions were identified concerning the background to selling art online and the opportunities and threats faced by the artist when they decide to sell online.

A first set of questions aimed at understanding the underpinnings of a history of selling art online and their makers and provided a brief understanding of how the art market developed online and how this development affects artists today, as the democratizing effect allows them to sell their handmade wares from their homes. This provided an understanding of the underpinnings of specific strategies that artists may employ since the art market online is still

growing and that art online is also still affected by booms in the market. This was crucial to account for as this could affect the responses that artists provide when discussing their motivations for selling on Etsy, and it also provided context to how this shaped the arts. . These perceptions are in terms of quality and the intricacies of dealing with the complex nature of using the world wide web to run a business.

In order to discover the theme of Artist Marketing and Product Management strategies in the interview guide it was enquired why artists chose Etsy over other platforms, along with how they developed their online business. This theme allowed for understanding why specific marketing strategies may have been elected over others and how significant algorithmic knowledge is for their profession. This section helps to ascertain motives based on the value they perceive Etsy to be providing and what they believe the platform could change to help them thrive as an art community. It is hoped that this will promote discussion on the benefits and weaknesses of using Etsy as their platform of choice and how this affects them as individuals when dealing with the online context of selling.

In order to investigate the third main theme of Relation between audience and clients, the interviews delved into how artists and sellers convince customers to virtually come to their stores and become active members within the store. This concept allowed a better understanding of how artists can motivate clients to frequent their stores. This assisted in operationalizing client interaction in the interview guide, where the research suggests that the artists may be using specific strategies to gain audience interaction through their sites, such as setting up a dialogue with the client. It was, therefore, possible to include questions about brand identity in the interview guide as well as clients being observed, to feel tied to the narrative created by the brand. This should encourage the artists to actively converse on how they manage clients and what strategies they apply to lure clients to their store.

Lastly, research suggests that artists are fulfilling their audience's desire to participate in the creation of artworks, therefore the participatory culture method was used. Thus, it provided context and understanding of how they relate to their customers and how they feel about changing their work. This also linked back to the concept of authenticity as artists are required to implement the ideas of the audience into their work. Thus, they need to negotiate how they proceed while ensuring that the work remains authentic to their identity. This participation allows ideas of changes to the artists' work to be understood. This concept should encourage

discussion on how artists feel about actively engaging with their audiences when it comes to their artwork. It should also encourage some feedback on how they interact with their customers, as this interaction occurs with the artist online and seems to be affecting the types of art purchased today.

### **3.5 Analysis**

The raw data analysis pertaining to the interviews was transcribed into a word document where the data was then transferred to ATLAS TI. Once in ATLAS TI, an in-depth comparison of the data was performed to determine if there was a pattern in research participants' responses (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013). The researcher applied a variety of inductive codes to uncover the patterns of Etsy seller decisions when it came to deciding which method would allow for the maximum reach to their desired target audience (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013). This study into how artists sell on Etsy employed concept coding, where codes originated from the existing literature before performing detailed data analysis. Consequently, the results revealed some perspectives which were not detailed by a priori codes, thus requiring the application of data-driven coding. Through the application of this method of coding, a nuanced insight into how artists sell their wall art on Etsy was achieved (Gibbs, 2012). It was necessary to conduct a thematic analysis as part of the coding process to see if any prevailing trends emerged in the study of Etsy sellers' decisions when it came to selling on e-commerce stores like Etsy. However, thematic analysis can be quite convoluted since they do not have clear procedures, thus leaving it vulnerable to the researchers' interpretation. To ensure that the work was valid, the researcher needed to be reflexive and transparent when writing out the procedure for the analysis (Bryman, 2012; Swain, 2018). It is common for scholars to differentiate between deductive and inductive methods when applying a thematic analysis (Swain, 2018). Lastly, the researcher elaborated on these principal themes by using elements of the transcripts that the researcher believes to be representative of the overarching categories discovered during the analysis. The iterative process of analysing the transcripts led to exemplary quotations being selected as prime examples of recurring themes that emerged during the research. These quotations were then merged into the findings section, contributing valuable insights.



### **3.6 Reliability and Validity**

#### **3.6.1 Validity**

To ensure the highest validity of results, the researcher actively engaged in a rigorous approach throughout the extensive investigation into How artists sell their wall art on Etsy. Validity can be defined as “A term describing a measure that accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure” (Babbie, 2020, p. 539). Having interviewed 13 participants who operate stores on Etsy and provided their individual and manifold perspectives, internal validation was secured (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012). As for the matter of external validity, the researcher was not seeking to create a generalizable pattern of events that could be compared to the experience of all makers on the Etsy platform (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012). The research aimed, to provide insights into the best practices employed by artists online and explore the lived experiences of artists selling on e-commerce platforms (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012).

#### **3.6.2 Reliability**

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher endeavored to ensure reliability through transparent and reflexive management of the data collected through a combination of strategies. To clarify this point, the researcher provided detailed transcriptions. Moreover, the researcher ensured the interviewees were provided with homogenous questions to guarantee the utmost dependability on the results. A detailed coding schedule and the interview guide provided by the researcher were utilized during the interviewing process with the participants (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012; Franklin, Ballan, 2001). These items were correspondingly delivered as a means of reflexivity and transparency to assist with the comprehension of the methodology employed by the researcher. Due to the nature of qualitative research, it is not within the realm of possibility to achieve reliability due to the circumstances of this research being a temporal point in the cultural setting (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012; Franklin, Ballan, 2001). Hence iterative methods and constant comparison of the results were conducted to provide an in-depth understanding of the shared life experiences of artists selling wall art on Etsy (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012; Franklin, Ballan, 2001).

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent was another consideration for this master's thesis since the participant ought to be informed how their data was utilized and what the interviewer had endeavoured to do to ensure their privacy (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012). The interviews all took place online since it was not possible for the researcher to travel. Secondly, the participants would presumably have felt more comfortable in their own environment. The researcher endeavoured to ensure these ethical considerations were accounted for when it came to safeguarding that no harm came to the participants nor to the researcher. To iterate the abovementioned point, the participants' details were also anonymized, so they could speak freely since their identities were not recognisable (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013).

## **4. Results**

The conducted interviews yielded a comprehensive and cohesive knowledge and perspectives of how artists sell their wall art on Etsy. The themes that emerged derived from the theoretical framework. Additionally, unanticipated themes emerged during the analysis of the data and were consequently accounted for during the discussion of the results. The theoretical framework provides the lens through which the interviews were analysed. Therefore, five main themes emerged during the analysis of the data in the following dimensions: Descriptive information on research participants, Authenticity in selling art online, Being artists online, Artist and marketers, and Artists and client's interactions.

### **4.1 Descriptive Information on Research Participants**

Background information was derived from 13 female interviewees selected to provide perspicuity on how artists sell their wall art on Etsy. The following descriptive data was collected and served to characterize the interviewee and their respective practices. Consequently, several themes emerged: Education, Occupation, Family, and Lifestyle.

#### **Education**

During the discourse of this paper, it was discovered that many of the artists had pursued some form of arts education: while only a small number had pursued other postsecondary educational opportunities in the sciences, public relations and political sciences, and an interpreter of foreign languages. Moreover, some artists who had completed some form of arts education had pursued qualifications in literature and project management (See Appendix A).

#### **Occupation**

The occupational background of the interviewees was particularly fascinating as many of the artists mentioned being full-time artists, and only a small number of the artists interviewed had occupations outside of their art professions. This stance aligned with Pace et al (2013) research that most of the sellers on Etsy were professional artists, and only a minority were self-taught artists.

The artists who maintained careers outside of their art careers had several motivations for pursuing careers outside of their art business. A few artists worked to supplement their incomes,

while one mentioned that they would never consider becoming a fully employed artist, as it would destroy their creativity.

### **Family**

Most of the artists had families and were either married or had partners. Nevertheless, only one artist cited having children of her own, while most artists either did not convey the presence of children or expressed that they had no children. A few communicated that they were child-free. This answer frequently emerged from dialogue when artists were questioned about their lifestyles.

Most of the artists' families were not artists themselves. Nonetheless, two of the artists noted that they had family members who were artists, and this guided them to pursue a vocation in the arts. Interviewee 7 said this about her background:

Yeah. So, my art career. I come from a family of artists. So, I have my um I can like in my family home. There's like paintings by my great grandmother. and then my grandmother, and then it kind of kept filtering down and out. So, my mother, and like 3 of my aunts, all paint on some level, or create on some level.

Hence, it was observed that familial connections could play a role in why some interviewees became artists.

### **Lifestyle**

The artists overwhelmingly stated that their lifestyles tended to be “quiet” and laid back. A number of artists expressed this point, while one artist said that her lifestyle was quite fluid and busy. Several artists provided information that their work was inspired by the way they lived and the places where they had been, hence there is some evidence that lifestyle is a factor in the creative procedure of artists and the subject matters that they elected to produce.

## **4.2 Authenticity in Selling Art Online**

The creation of authenticity by wall artists was very nuanced and convoluted due to the nature of how artists implicitly define the authenticity of their art. Nevertheless, artists tended to contrive authenticity via a miscellany of methods and strategies which they implicitly applied to their artworks.

#### 4.2.1 Authenticity as a Unique Selling Point

Furthering the investigation of the delineation of authenticity that was highlighted in Chhabra (2005), the researcher discovered that most artists frequently connected the authenticity of the products to their personal narratives, which were coded as narrative authenticity and personal biography, thus reflecting that the artists' identities play a vital role in the creation and parametrization of the authenticity of their artworks. To elucidate this attribute, interviewee 2, who could be regarded as an outsider artist, mentioned that she was not a formally trained artist and had no desire to pursue this as a full-time career as this would destroy her passion for her art and this is what she said:

I hate to go into the post office, and so it and it's um it kind of to me I was like when my art starts to feel like a job. That's what I need to re-evaluate. Because if that happens, then that's going to make me stop. I'm not going to want to do it anymore, and I don't want that. I like it's too important to me. And so, I'd rather. you know, have a house full of stuff that doesn't sell that or that that you know I don't have anywhere to sell it at then. Have, then have my art feel like a job where I'm just like making stuff to sell. which is what I don't ever do or make things to sell, and sometimes like what I've had shows, I have kind of like gotten caught up in that. And then I have to always like, remind myself to kind of like check and take a step back (.) and be because I don't know your art changes when you when you make it to sell a lot. Sometimes it doesn't it's not as representative of you, um and you know for me a lot of people Colour, bright colour is very important to me in my arts, and a lot of people would say to me. Oh, you should do neutral people. I wish I, you know, had new like neutrals for a house blah blah blah like neutral colours. and so, I made a couple of neutrals they sold, but they weren't that fun to make. So, you know it's just balance.

Accordingly, Interviewee 2 exemplifies the delineation of authenticity in her art, considering her art as an integral part of her being. She expressed a deliberate rejection of pecuniary value in favour of preserving the authenticity of the artistic experience, aligning with the work of Alexander and Bowers (2021) on outsider artists who abstain from seeking monetary gains for the pursuit of free artistic expression. Interviewee 2's unique perspective stood in contrast to many other artists who were actively pursuing their art careers.

Additionally, another form of creating and defining authenticity for the wall art that was not utilized by most artists was the concept suggested by Thurnell (2019) which was geographical authenticity. In the context of geographical authenticity, one can observe how the

use of national or cultural heritage identity as a marketing tool and how it can be considered an implicit form of traditionalization, as Koontz (2010) pointed out when companies use the history of their product to sell it. The application of the French cultural background utilized by interviewee 12 constitutes traditionalization and defines the authenticity of the product.

Interviewee 12 stated that:

It is like on the front, banner of the store, and even in some tags and some offers. I try to through like French artists, because it is something kind of not specific to me, because there's a lot of French artists, but on Etsy, and with my audience that is more in the US. And UK being French, is in assets.

The art that interviewee 12 was selling is not a traditional art form, however, this marketing procedure has obtained sales for her store. The researcher inferred this was due to the implicit connection of the prestige of French artists. Consequently, this could imply that consumers are applying taste perceptions when deliberating on the authenticity of the artworks furthering the decision to exchange what they perceived as cultural capital for economic capital.

According to Thurnell (2019), during intervals of change, individuals seek out unique experiences. This was evident for the researcher as some of the artists interviewed started to sell their art during Covid 19 or one artist mentioned that her sales had risen during Covid which aligned with the Art Basel (McAndrew, 2022) report that there had been a slight proliferation in sales during this period. Consequently, this highlighted the fact that most individuals during this period were seeking out authentic experiences which these artists provided. Moreover, a notable observation is that the artists often reported that their lives were tranquil or monotonous. Thus, one plausible inference was that these artists utilize their art as a mechanism of creating unique and significant experiences for themselves to abate feelings of malaise and alienation that contemporary society can produce, and the artists' epiphenomenon constructed an authentic experience for their audiences. Interviewee 5, cited that her artistic endeavours began during Covid 19 as a way to connect to individuals and to make people laugh during a formidable interval of transition, as a result of this connection and the positive feedback from her audience arose the increased interest in purchasing her art. Interviewee 5 expressed her motivations for engaging in artistic endeavours during the pandemic, stating:

It was just to keep myself occupied and to make people laugh during the pandemic, and it goes, during which I thought would make people laugh and about kind of human connection, and about things. We share our common humanity. And uh then people start saying, oh, can I buy that off you? And well, maybe I can make some money out of it since I don't have a job. and that's why I opened the shop and to why I stuff.

This reflects the power of temporal authenticity to sell and promote a desire for a product, as many individuals in the general public sought authentic experiences during an interval of change and malaise during the pandemic.

Conversely, most artists were making use of material and procedural authenticity. Material, and Procedural Authenticity, were often created through narratives in that the artist would articulate their creative process, and their stories would be conveyed by either saying that their procedure was unique or that they utilized tools or materials which provided their product with authenticity. One of the artists engaged in selling oil paintings and prints. During the interview (interviewee 3), she shared anecdotes about her childhood, emphasizing her father's and grandfather's artistic background. She said:

And so, I just. I just went into it and just started and learned as much as I could online what I would need, and I had a few of my father and my grandfather's brushes and materials here, so that kind of got me going.

In her creative procedure, she incorporated the tools inherited from her father and grandfather, thus establishing a connection with her familial artistic heritage. This method reflects procedural and material authenticity. This enables the artist to convey a compelling product authenticity by imbuing the artwork with nostalgia; by employing elements that evoke nostalgia, the artist aims to establish a deep and meaningful connection between the artwork and the viewer.

While interviewee 11 provided an exemplary example of the application of narrative and otherizing of her product through indicating that she perceived her work to be unique.

Interviewee 11 articulated her sentiment by stating:

I would. I think so. I have myself Haven't, really come across anything that that does what I do definitely. You know I have my inspirations as well, and there's things that are similar, but I feel confident in saying that I create quite unique things, and then it's also a matter of I sell originals, and I sell like handmade screen prints as well, so I try to create like a feeling of exclusivity Um. and I don't think what I make you could get anything else, or at least not that I've found hehe.

This was a significant indication of narratives being influential for selling wall art online as the artist, as witnessed overhead, perceived their art to be distinctive and, accordingly, an implicit acuity of being outside the mainstream was observed. This also displays us and them marketing technique whereby the artist applying language has created an ingroup of individuals who possess their wall art. This method was one of the modes to construct novelty and desire for a product as it would produce a level of distinction for the consumer. The consumers were pursuing avenues to self-differentiate themselves.

#### **4.2.2 Authenticity and Mass Production**

Several artists employed a print-on-demand strategy to sell reproductions of their original artworks. Thus, like Luckman and Andrews, (2020) suggested applying, assembly lines could enhance artists' ability to reproduce content rapidly. However, the researcher found that the artist would reassert authenticity through the quality of the print or controlling the printing process in their homes. Consequently, their aspects of procedural and material authenticity and connection to the client were often very significant for these sellers. Nonetheless, some artists indicated disapproval of mass production because it could not capture particular elements of texture, depth, and hue (1,2,11). Interviewee 1 expressed her opinion about mass production stating:

Yeah, definitely not as authentic because one is a copy of a thing, and one is the actual thing. Like a picture of a dog and a. Versus a dog. It's kind of like a why? Like painting on rocks because you get an object you don't. It's two things at once, like the image is very, very important. Um The image expresses a lot. But well if you have. An actual like. It depends. It depends on the medium. Um because how you see it in real life is very different. Like my even my um acrylic paintings have a lot of texture on them. And there's layers and it just doesn't come through. As an image like it's not the same. And there's only one.

However, they tended to understand the motivations behind why other artists elected this method because of the convenience and financial implications of selling the work multiple times. The idea that artists could also maintain authenticity by stating that their art had still been handmade by an individual was yet another consideration for the assembly line. According to Luckman and Andrews (2020), while still retaining their audience held some merit as interviewee 7 underscored that she considered her Canadian consumers and endeavoured to support only local Canadian enterprise. Hence, reinforcing a form of authenticity and connection hitherto to the client base. She also cut her prints by hand, and she received a complaint from a



consumer who was not pleased that they could see the edging of the paper. This proved Luckman and Andrews, (2020) assertion that individuals were not searching for manifestations of the maker in the crafts or in this case wall-art. Interviewee 9, whose establishment name was withheld to preserve ethical considerations, showed a different manifestation of this phenomenon. She employed this approach in the nomenclature of her establishment, although interviewee 9 did not explicitly convey this sentiment. Additionally, she maintained stringent control over the printing process to ensure the quality of the prints.

Redemption against the caustic nature of capitalism was of interest as several artists mentioned fast fashion and the theft of craft labour. Interviewee 13 highlighted that a sizable corporation employing Etsy had stolen one of her artworks. Thus, the caustic nature of capitalism seems to have invaded craft platforms like Etsy, which aligns with Thurnell (2019), whose participants highlighted the fear of co-optation of creation of authenticity. Yet another point was contended by interviewee 5 who relayed that she had some doubts as to Etsy sincerity when it came to their narratives of being for small business. She indicated:

I don't I don't disagree. I just think this: I think a lot of people feel that they're not championing small businesses because of the costs, and um so their when they advertise themselves as a platform and the marketplace, I think they're like we are all, about small businesses like, find something unique. Come here and get something directly from a seller. It's really nice, my building connections and that sort of thing which true.

Hence, the researcher inferred that Etsy had fallen prey to the caustic nature of capitalism as it allowed corporations to sell on their platform, which goes against the spirit of connecting buyers to sellers.

Several artists perceived the need to compete with mass-produced items as they judged that they had to reduce the pricing of their wall art to be competitive within their given niche. One artist expressed her contempt with the fact that Etsy had allowed dropships on to Etsy, however she did express that she was satisfied that Esty was addressing the problem as she felt that the site was there for makers and small businesses owners. The following statement was expressed by interviewee 4:

Basically. the con would be all uh the mass producers or ug drop shipping companies that is currently on it. I know that Etsy is trying to take them away and minimize them. So, it's just real people with small businesses and like handmade stuff.

Interviewee 5 commented that she had seen ads for Etsy on TV in the UK, which was intriguing as it seemed to align with Fiona Hackney's assessment that there has been a resurgence of the desire for handmade crafts, however; this was not mentioned by other artists (2006). The closest comparable comment that the researcher could locate was discontent from interviewee 7 about the off-site advertising that Etsy does to promote itself to the mainstream. She expressed that this was because she could not opt out of the advertising. Hence an implicit link was construed by the researcher that Etsy was appealing to the mass market's thirst for authentic encounters (Thurnell, 2019).

## **4.3 Being Artists Online**

### **4.3.1 Motivations for Using Etsy**

Online artists expressed that they had difficulty with precisely locating when they were first introduced to Etsy. Regardless, multiple artists attested to discovering Etsy through acquaintances and familial connections or their own association with Etsy as patrons. Therefore, the researcher submits that Etsy has evolved as a feature of the community milieu, with many makers being cognizant of Etsy's existence as an online marketplace.

Furthermore, artists expressed a combination of motivations for why they resolved to sell their wall art online. Several artists noted that they elected to employ Etsy as an online platform to test if their wall art would sell or as a starting point for their businesses. Some artists indicated that after they left art institutions, they considered selling on Etsy to establish themselves as artists and their desire to own their businesses. A few artists conveyed that their audience had requested them to sell their work. For illustration interviewee 10 highlighted that one of her rationales for utilizing Etsy was to reach her online audience:

... And online was also a way to connect with the people that followed me on Twitch that they could buy stuff from where from here in the Netherlands versus where they lived, so I could send them to over the whole world, and I will still be able to get it.

This reasoning was similar to interviewees 1,2,9 who indicated that part of the reasoning behind applying Etsy platform was to curate and have a directory to their store for their audiences. A certain number of artists cited reaching a wider audience as one of the reasons why they elected to sell online, as Etsy provided them with a global audience.

Most of the artists who operate businesses on Etsy cited multiple sources of income that were not related to their stores. Hence, the researcher discovered that many artists regard Etsy as a supplement to their income. One of the artists articulated that it was her sole source of income. However, the bulk of artists partook in commission pieces for clients or companies along with several artists participating in fairs, and few artists maintained alternative professions outside of their art vocations to sustain themselves.

Geographical location was discovered to be one of the reasons artists decided to sell online. Interviewee 8 expressed the following:

because there is the only option for me that I can sell it online because I don't want to do any job. Now I started selling it online, and I live in a rural area. So, there is not any. Oh. option there, can I like? There's I can now put it on stall and exhibition because it said rural area. eh.

due to her rural location and that she had no other avenues for promoting her wall art outside of Etsy, she also noted that her attempted freelancing on platforms like Fiver and discovered that she was not satisfied with these outlets and that Etsy suited her requirements. In addition to the aforementioned artist, interviewees 7,10 and 13 indicated that their geographical loci affected their motivation to sell their artworks online.

After establishing the motivations for why artists created their online stores, it became incumbent to contrive how artists sell online which will be covered exhaustively in the preceding section.

#### **4.3.2 Entrepreneurial Insights**

When discussing entrepreneurial insights, artists expressed various perspectives regarding what it is like to operate a business on Etsy. Interviewee 6 highlighted the multiplicities of being a business owner as well as artist in this statement “It's not so. It's not like being an artist is a you know, a Oscar Wilde esque thing while there is a thing you know it's um it's business.”. This statement depicts the pendulum that artists must account for in order to have a prosperous business, as they are required to market their work to sell their products while producing artwork. Interviewee 6 noted that she did not retain notions of being an artist as a romantic concept; she perceived selling her art as running a business. Interviewee 2 and 11 indicated that they desired to focus on their art more than they did on running the business and interviewee 4 and 11 expressed dissatisfaction with the time it took them to market and optimise

the listings through tags to ensure that their works would sell. These illustrations provide acuity on how artist perceive operating a business online and how some artists are frustrated by the amount of labour their business from their creative process.

The collective of interviewees have different business model strategies. These strategies were: physical artworks, print on demand and digital products. Each respective strategy had its merit and demerits. However, the researcher scrutinized that artists who produced physical products were more inclined to introduce subjects of authenticity or mass production. The researcher posited that this phenomenon could be attributed to the uncertainty of selling the artworks once, thus, requiring the demand to produce additional works. This notion aligns with the previously stated viewpoint by interviewee 1, who pointed out that her creations were often colligated with print rather than being acknowledged as original artworks. Nevertheless, most of the interviewed artists tended to conduct mixed method models of selling either prints and physical products or print, digital products or other items which are not specifically relevant to the preceding thesis (colouring books, dishes, and T-shirts).

Most sellers indicated that shipping expenditures are one of the invisible economic limitations of selling on Etsy. Several artists expressed that this was one of the significant expenses of operating a business on Etsy. Furthermore, one of the prevalent grievances articulated by customers to several artists were received due to lost and stolen art. Consequently, this has led to sellers occasionally needing to substitute lost or stolen art. A handful of artists expressed that when it came to managing lost artwork, artists would often apologise for the inconvenience and refund or send a new copy of the lost product. However, this phenomenon was not seen with physical art. A small number of artists also highlighted that sending their artworks tracked was yet another expense and interviewee 7 indicated that she did not pay for tracked shipping to keep her costs down for her audience. Interviewee 7, however, also underscored that this had cost her the Star Seller badge as one of the requirements was to track items. However, Interviewees 10 and 12 sent their items tracked and had expressed that the star badge did appear to improve their sales due to being a sign of credibility of their Etsy store. One of the other complaints that were brought up by some of the interviewees was the reliability of their shipping services in their areas and this being one of the areas where loss of art appeared. Interviewee 12 angrily mentioned that she had sent an order tracked which was supposed to increase the safety of the product. However, this procedure was not full proof and one of her

clients reached out and mentioned that part of her order had been stolen. Luckily interviewee 12 had shipping insurance and was able to recover the costs. Interviewee 7 astutely noted that she incorporated the cost of replacing her art prints into her pricing therefore even if the print was lost, she would still make a small profit. Interviewee 11 mentioned that where she was able to, she would deliver her art personally as most of her works are originals and she has thus far not lost an artwork which she noted was one of the anxieties of shipping her work. Thus, this demonstrates that shipping can be a nuanced decision based on the artists location and the reliability of their chosen mail provider. Interviewee 10 demonstrates this point as she indicated that she charges more for the comfort of knowing the company she had selected is reliable.

Several artists mentioned that when they priced their items they were told by family, friends, or clients that their prices should be adjusted. However, interviewee 9 highlighted that she often did not feel secure in increasing her price while her boyfriend thought she should. Another pricing strategy that was seen was by interviewee 8 who said she had started with lower priced items in order to gain sales on the platform. However, she was reprimanded by a few of her clients for underselling her work and thus increased the amount they paid her for her custom services. However, she was the only participant that mentioned this happening. Interviewee 2 also articulated that she had priced her artworks based on their sentimental value to her. This was somewhat echoed by interviewee 9 who said that she regretted parting with some of her originals and so she started to sell prints to retain her more sentimental pieces. Thus, it can be observed that there are many factors that can affect how artist elect to price their art and it is often based on looking at competitors and how much the artist believes the work is worth according to them.

A minority of participants highlighted that they had reached out for professional assistance when it came to operating their business. Interviewee 4 and 11 mentioned receiving aid from professionals when it came to branding or manging their stores. Both artists indicated that this had benefited their art stores and provide them with useful information. The researcher then inferred that while the Etsy platform for the most part was user friendly the artist still faced challenges when it came to marketing and branding which will be covered in subsequent sections.

Novaković (2021) and Rani, (2017) observes that online platforms provide visibility, and another source of income was observed. Most of the artist mentioned that they employed Etsy for greater visibility as an income stream. Very few artists applied Etsy as their only source

of income. However, some did mention that it was the biggest source of income for them. Interviewee 11 said that she would supplement her income with Etsy and would produce more works for the platform when her consignment work was low. Hence it was observed that for some artists Etsy acted as a financial stabilizer as it has the potential to provide steady income.

A minority of the artists mentioned that the user interface that Etsy has was one of the reasons they chose Etsy as it allowed for a better and easier experience for their customers where they could easily leave reviews. One artist mentioned that she did desire to have more customizable features to personalize her store.

Another consideration for operating a business off Etsy was how products were managed by the artist. Interviewee 1 expressed that photographing her work to ensure high quality images was time consuming as she would then need to upload these images to Etsy as well. Several artists mentioned that they chose to utilize slightly more expensive packaging materials to be more sustainable and a few mentioned that they customized feature in their packaging to make their client feel that they were being provided with unique experience which interviewee 10 mentioned was one of the reasons she enjoyed shopping on Etsy as she felt that it was more personalised and she expressed dissatisfaction with one product that she had bought from Etsy that had not come with personalised packaging or freebie. Interviewee 10 and 11 both mentioned that they tried to create exclusivity for their art through either pricing it high so that customers would value it more to personally packaging and sending freebies and thank you notes to the client which was something interviewee 4 mentioned she like when she received art prints from artists. Interviewee 10 was the only artist who mentioned that she also photographed her products with gloves to indicate a level of prestige and as she put it “Fanciness”. It was thus observed that artists utilize many strategies to make their art appealing to clients.

### **4.3.3 Business Models and Financial Crisis**

#### **4.3.3.1 Selection of Business Model**

Several established artists on Etsy disclosed that they sold various products before determining their present method. One artist for instance, expressed her discontentment that she had Lino prints repeatedly colligated to reproduction. Consequently, there appeared to be an implicit dissatisfaction with mass production as it was perceived to be less genuine. Nonetheless, the artist noted that she acknowledged the value and practicality of prints as the artists were able

to sell more of their works, thus creating a steady income for themselves. This highlighted the nuanced relationship between artists trying to maintain authenticity and financial stability within their profession. One of the artists (Interviewee 7) who applied the print-on-demand method with some of her items being drop-shipped from outside of her home gave this reason for why she chose to mass produce her art:

um it came from wanting to be able to mass produce easier because I didn't want the slog of having to like, prepare for something and paint 50 paintings ahead of time like, who wants that? Some people do. And it's. and they're really great with it, but I can't do it.

Thus, it was observed that she elected to sell prints since it allowed for easy store management and freed up her time. Additional artists who applied print-on-demand provided several reasons for the election of this strategy. For example, Interviewee 9 expressed that it was convenient when it came to time and retaining some of her artworks. Print-on-demand also meant that the artists did not end up with dead stock if they controlled the printing process. However, Interviewees 5 and 12 mentioned that they also outsourced this and had stock waiting to be, distributed to the clients. Interview 12 expressed dissatisfaction with this as she highlighted that she had about 2000 euros of stock in her cupboards waiting to be sold. She articulated that for the work she would launch, she would control the print process from her residence to reduce expenses and inventory issues.

An additional strategy utilized by one artist was digital downloads. Whereby she created custom portraits digitally. She expressed that this reduced her costs as there was no shipping fee to consider when producing the art. Furthermore, she also stated that she was unable to do physical art due to financial and health-related issues, making this strategy the most feasible option for her lifestyle at this current time. However, she did express that she would potentially consider selling physical artwork in the future.

Moreover, only two artists utilized physical products. Furthermore, both mentioned that they would consider selling prints of some of their products. However, they said their opposition to print lay in the fact that it would lose some of its aesthetic value concerning textures and hue, which links to Walter Benjamin's (2018) fear of the loss of authenticity due to reproducibility. However, interviewee 2 stated she would consider turning some of her watercolours into prints.

Furthermore, several artists utilized a mix of these strategies, which allowed for the best of both systems as they were able to sell originals for higher profits while their prints continued

to bring in a needed steady source of income. Interviewee 3, who applied a mixed method, indicated that she would look at trends of what clients were purchasing and then turn these into collections that her clients could purchase. Hence, it appears that each model has its benefits and disadvantages, and that the choice of method was often tied to artists' lifestyle choices. At this point the researcher came to comprehend that methods employed by the artist were required to suit their personal needs, or the strategy would be of no use to the artist. An excellent example of this is Interviewee 5, who stated that she utilized print-on-demand partly because she did not have the space to store a large amount of inventory for her store.

Another reason interviewee 11 gave for doing original works, such as her screen prints was that it created exclusivity for her clients. In contrast, artists who chose to print-on-demand prioritised making their products affordable for their audiences. A few artists mentioned that this was a choice to ensure sales to their stores. This was because their clients did not need to make a massive financial commitment to their work. Therefore, the researcher posits that artists should employ business models that align with their lifestyles and personal goals for their businesses.

#### **4.3.3.2 Financial Crises**

Several artists articulated concerns that in 2023 their art sales had declined, and interviewee 5 considered that the algorithm and the living cost crises may have been contributing factors for her decline in sales:

And I was meant to come back again in January, but I only opened my shop like a week ago and nothing. I just saw 2 things in the last like 2 weeks. Um It's completely dropped off. So, this obviously something in the algorithm stuff because I'm still advertising just the trajectory is just (hear hands slapping together)

While interviewee 12 suggested that the economic downturn was affecting her Etsy sales thus it can be seen that selling on Etsy can be a delicate matter as there are numerous factors to account for. Interviewee 12 expressed:

There's a lot of things that affect the culture, and, like all the ours, and we have the like the worst when it comes to that, because we are in a what is it called like a pleasure purchase. People get content from us because they can pay for everything else you need to think about your basic needs before just getting a book. So, you know it's a bit more complex. There are a lot of reasons why my income is decreasing, but I don't want to give up on that just because it's a hard time.

This was then reiterated by interviewee 5 who explained:



Yeah. yeah, it could be it. It feels like I've kind of dropped off the platform somehow, but it I mean it. It's not. You know. We're also very. I'm very aware that we're going to have a living crisis, and I'm making stuff that people don't need. Really. So, um it has a big part in it as well. These two examples demonstrate that there is a fear that the living crisis is affecting their sale online and that the algorithm is not the reason of their lack of sales. Interviewee 8 also said she had not made a sale in the last three months and that she could not contrive why her sales had come to a halt. However, she did say that she had started posting to her social media again in an effort to gain sales.

Interviewee 7 mentioned that her printing-on-demand method provided, a sense of security during the recession since she sold what she phrased as “low stake” art. However, interviewees 5, 8 and 12 also had low-stake items that were not selling. Thus, the researcher deduced that the audience and popularity of her art form played a role in this. Hence, recalling Rosen's' Superstar theory, whereby a minority of artists get acknowledged for their talents, and the majority only make a moderate amount of financial remuneration from their artworks (Alexander, 2020). Nonetheless, Interviewee 7 is an exemplary example of Alexander and Bowler's (2021) and Fine's (2003) elucidations of the winner-win and often, the loser-lose theory is not entirely correct as these artists, for the most part, are seeking to make economic profits from their artworks. Only Interviewee 2 was observed to be satiating this concept as she rejected the notion of monetary value for the enjoyment of creation. Consequently, the artist does not win by forfeiture of economic gains, as stated in the loser-lose theory (Alexander & Bowler, 2021).

The economic crises had artists communicated as contributing facets to the challenges encountered in conducting online businesses. Consequently, the researcher inferred that the economic climate has an impact on the art industry, as corroborated by the Art Basel report (McAndrew, 2022), which underscored the influence of Covid on sales. Therefore, the researcher reasoned that these unfortunate circumstances are one of the repercussions of the pandemic, among other factors. The artists are acutely aware that they are selling creations that may not be deemed essential by their clientele. Nevertheless, they have observed a decline in sales, which artists articulated attributed to a financial crisis.

## 4.4 Artist and Marketers

### 4.4.1 Personal Branding

Solga's (2013) assessment of efficacious branding importance was reiterated by most artists regardless of whether or not they had syndicate brands. While those with compelling brands often provided reasoning for why they nominated to create their brands. They often highlighted how their brands had lured customers to their stores or keeping their brand consistent over all their social media platforms to assist audience with recognizing them.

Several artists attributed their success on Etsy to their strong branding, and some artists mentioned that once they incorporated aspects of branding into their store their sales improved. Consequently, to be successful online, the artist needs to construct a strong brand identity, as articulated in the Hiscox trade report (2019). This was one of the motivations why customers selected one store over another. Thus, branding is seen to be vital for creating and maintaining an online store such as Etsy. One of the artists with the strongest brand identity mentioned that she had created several features to lure customers to her store:

Yes, yes, I have a little character. I actually have one right here. It looks like this. It is a fried shrimp and a cat combined. I have more of them notes. Oh, maybe I have them in my chin. Here's another one. Basically, I have this phrase, almost every word. So yeah, it's like an orange thing. Also, on my Twitch stream. They basically appear there. and I just brought them over to my at Etsy store as well. So, if you see my banner or that character isn't there, and when I write my cards, I say greetings for me and the shrimp cats or the mascot. And now that I have these stickers, they will be included as well. So, I would just put a lick little sticker because people can ask like, hey, what is that? And maybe they remember that maybe they won't, but that's also spreading my thing further. It's the same with my greeting cards. Let me see if I also have one here, because my greeting cards just have has an art piece of mine. and then on the back. It has my information. So, if someone likes the card, they will keep the card. They will stick it on to something, but they still have my information. So that's way I keep sharing. Yeah, what I made or who I am. Basically and not only me on Etsy but me on everywhere. feel every social media or online presence. I can't find a card.

Hence the researcher discovered that she had created a brand that she kept cohesive across her social media accounts to make it more accessible for her audience to know who she is as an artist. This was also attributed by interviewee 5 as a marker of quality and she stated:

Very important. I'm very particular about design in general and um and consistency, and I've tried to be consistent with my branding. so, I've made myself a logo, and I use on everything, and I'm trying to, and even in my design is partly by design. I use the same to the palette of colours and all my work. Pretty much. So yeah. So, part of that, vibe, I think. Um Yeah, I don't know. I think I think as a shop. I think it's really important for trust building. I think um people expect quality. If you have good branding. and I think it's worked really well. In that respect. I've got a sign board thing with my logo on it, which I put on my table and at market as well, and it just legitimizes what I'm doing. I think it next. People trusted more, and so I mean I'm a bit of a snob. I think if I see someone's work, and I can't see the name or the logo, or their company name on the table, and I just don't expect it to be good. which is, which is silly, really. But I don't know. I think it's important.

This demonstrated the importance of branding to the researcher, and this was further confirmed by a few artists who noted that their sales improved after they incorporated branding into their stores. Based on these statements the researcher observed that they implicitly displayed both Blanchflower (2016), and Koontz (2010) assessment that otherizing to products via branding as a marker of novelty and quality could improve the authenticity of the product.

The majority of artists deemed branding to be significant. Several artists were still in the process of defining their brands, however as stated previously; some of the artists had noted an increase in sales when they improved branding, which aligns with the Hiscox trade report (2019), where clients emphasised that branding was a contributing factor in their consideration for purchasing art from an artist. Consequently, the researcher deduced that branding plays a vital role in luring customers to artists' stores as this is the first demonstration of the perceived quality and authenticity of artists' creations.

#### **4.4.2 Marketing Artworks**

The marketing strategies utilized by artists selling wall art on Etsy encompass an array of approaches. Moreover, it is noteworthy that several artists have employed marketing strategies such as Otherizing and Lock-in techniques to promote and sell their art along with other methods. According to the Hiscox trade report (2019), customers usually discovered the artist via social media, while customers followed the artist's social media accounts. Customers prefer to establish a connection to the makers of the wall art they purchase online by virtue of their authenticity of identity narratives and oppositional authenticity which aligns with Koontz (2010) assessment of Otherizing whereby an in-group is created and in this case the utilization of social

media to connect with potential clients and is also reflected by Yoon, et al, (2008) with the conversational nature of selling online in contemporary society. However, one artist expressed that she felt pressure to provide her audience on social media with content that they would appreciate and thus it can be seen that advertising has somewhat become part sharing narrative around the creation of art.

A concept that intrigued the researcher was that not many of the artists utilized the Etsy advertisement scheme for several factors varying from scarcity of results in accumulating sales to the verity that financially the artists could not afford to operate advertisements either due to finance or due to the heightened costs of their geographical location. This was true for interviewee 8. Most artists interviewed highlighted the application of social media platforms as an integral component in promoting their creations. Social media introduced an additional algorithm outside of Etsy that artists needed to navigate. Additionally, increasing artists' responsibilities within the administration of their stores. The researcher discovered that social media and the algorithm facilitated artists' stores. Interviewee 8 communicated that while her store was experiencing challenges, it was not due to the search engine optimisation system (SEO). SEO is a tool that artists employ to increase their visibility within Etsy and social media algorithms as a mechanism of luring clients via strategic tagging of uploaded art for sale on Etsy (Erdmann, et al, 2022; Klawitter and Hargittai, 2018). Optimising their listing artist's goal is to rate higher in the search engine so they emerge within the first few pages of results. Interviewee 8 noted that she recently initiated marketing campaigns on Instagram to boost sales of custom digital portraiture. Additionally, interviewee 8 used free portraits to gain sales online. However, she also highlighted whilst advertising on Etsy during the period of hardship left her incapable to secure this service. This sentiment was echoed by interviewee 12, who indicated that this was when she needed to advertise more, but she was financially unable to. As for the benefits of using ads, most artists said that they did not work for their methods, which were print-on-demand and physical. Yet another consideration was from interviewee 7, who expressed dissatisfaction that Etsy would not let her opt out of offsite advertising due to the size of her store. During the discussion on Etsy advertising, Interviewee 12 articulated a strategic approach of only promoting bestsellers. This strategy was utilised with the motivation to obtain sales to the store. Once the potential clients had reached the store, the clients had the opportunity to discover and examine additional products they potentially desired to purchase. It would be reasonable to

enunciate that there are varying perspectives on the usefulness of Etsy advertisement campaigns but for the most part artists did not utilize Etsy advertising schemes. One of the perceptions was that it simply did not bring enough clients into justify the expense.

Another noticeable strategy employed by two of the interviewed artists was the store drop method, whereby they would promote their upcoming art or other product releases in advance. Interviewee 10 specifically expressed employing this method to lure sales to her store, particularly around the period when she released the latest listings. Hence, the researcher observed that this method successfully enticed clients as it provided a sense of urgency and scarcity for the product. By operating the store drop strategy, both artists successfully leveraged the store drop method to stimulate customer interest. The store drop method aligns with Geissler (2001) who enunciated that sellers had about 5- 30 seconds to attract customers to their stores, which the store drop method appears to do seamlessly. However, both artists emphasised that they were not actively using this system as both artists communicated that it could be labour intensive, time-consuming, and also meant they needed to plan in advance to initiate a shop drop. This also highlighted Verona, and Prandelli (2002). lockin method as they had created a community that desired the product and felt connected to the makers of the product. Thus, the researcher also observed the creation of ingroups hence and implicit connection with Koontz work was observe (2010).

The researcher acknowledges the presence of numerous strategies which could be applied to promote artists' wall art online. Nonetheless, the researcher observed that optimizing listings and social media to drive sales were significant factors in achieving purchases on Etsy. Several artists conveyed that when examining their analytics, they observed that Etsy supplied most of their sales. Moreover, interviewee 7 astutely noted that this had not always been the situation for her, and when she launched her store, her social media account drew most of her clientele. Hence social media plays a crucial function in operating a store on the Etsy e-commerce platform.

#### **4.4.3 Algorithm and Sales**

Klawitter and Hargittai's (2018) assessment that the algorithm is vital for creative entrepreneurs' success being significant but underutilised was prevalent within this study. Several artists, while aware of the significance of optimising their listings, often lack the knowledge to effectively enhance their visibility through Search Engine Optimisation. Artists

tend to use SEO sparingly. The researcher termed this the artistic administration of art business online. Interviewee 11 expressed the following:

uhm Yeah, that's it. It's like it's written for marketers as well. And to a certain extent I don't mind putting in the energy. But, like I, said I, if I spent 8 hours working a day, I want like at least 6 of those to be like making things.

This statement demonstrates and elucidates that while artists understand the importance of the algorithm, they tend to feel that they themselves are not marketers. Most of the artists understood the prominence of the algorithm for directing views to their Etsy store. However, only a minority of artists communicated that they operated SEO (Search engine optimization) agencies such as E-rank for keyword searches. The majority of the artists noted involving methods of scrutinizing what their competitors were utilizing for keyword searches. Artists frequently indicated that they would explore Etsy for comparable competitors' artworks, which was analogous to theirs as a guide for which terms to employ for titling their art. A particular number of the artists interviewed mentioned that they regarded the algorithm as aggravating due to the amount of time it bore them to perform this duty. Interviewee 4, creatively suggested that AI could be employed to reduce this artistic admin of probing for the optimal keywords to achieve views:

for me? It's been difficult. because I would like to have a platform where you can. You upload your product and the metadata it doesn't get. Yes. like. Why don't add a AI to read the picture or read the project to make the meta data for the customer. Uh So it gets easier for us.

However, artists mentioned that Etsy and social media trends could be beneficial if they promote their stores. Yet, this was not always possible, as interviewee 4 mentioned that while these digital trends could facilitate sales, it correspondingly required the trend to be within her niche. She furthermore said that optimizing her listings was time-consuming and not feasible. The concept of trends was not a topic that was widely discussed by artists. Nonetheless, interviewees 5, 6 and 10 cited that if sellers desired to rank higher in the algorithm, artists could operate seasonal occasions to promote their sales online. Interviewee 3 articulated the following sentiment when it came to trends “So whatever the next wave of popularity is just kind of incorporate that in your titles that helps to bring it forward as well. Yeah.”

Having considered the algorithm, it has been observed that it is vital to have knowledge of how to incorporate it into the wall art stores as it will improve visibility of the store as well as reaching the desired target audience which was expressed by Interviewee 7:

I think it helped that piece become the best seller. And then I remember, like slowly, I wish I had like tracked the timeline of it a little bit better. But I remember like just going through my whole shop, and just like going ham just being like what other words I'm like and like. Sometimes you don't even know you're part of a subculture kind of thing, until, like it's glaring you in the face, are you? And so like. I was looking at similar listings just to see, like.

This was of interest to the researcher as Interviewee 7 reflected that apprehending one's subculture could aid the improvement of keyword searches and could be of service as Interviewee 13 also stated that it was easier for her work to be discovered because she understood her niche, which was inspired by the work of the writer JRR Tolkien. She has also posited that her art was inspired by her lifestyle. Consequently, understanding attributes of the artists' identity can help them comprehend their target audience when constructing a listing. Thus, the artist's prerequisite is to identify themselves to comprehend their clients.

#### **4.4.4 Opportunities and Threats of Selling Online**

The analysis of Etsy's perceived strengths and weaknesses as an e-commerce platform for artists to market wall art was derived from several perceptions artists experienced in operating a business on Etsy. It was frequently correlated with inducements and prerequisites for their online shops. Thus, a succinct summation of the risks and prospects of marketing wall art on Etsy was outlined in the subsequent quarter.

Many artists mentioned Etsy's international reach as a prominent factor that influenced their decision to employ the e-commerce platform. Several of the artists underscored that Etsy afforded them the opportunity to establish connections with an international audience, a prospect that would have been otherwise unattainable for some artists.

Dorie et al. (2017) cited that, sellers expressed dissatisfaction with Etsy, citing multiple underlying factors. Although dissatisfaction with the Etsy platform was observed most of the dissatisfaction with Etsy centred around the fact that Etsy's commissions had increased. Furthermore, most artists regarded this as a necessary trade-off for selling on the Etsy platform. Additionally, some artists articulated that they would perceive higher satisfaction if Etsy enhanced transparency regarding the rationale behind commission fee increases. One of the artists expressed her concern that in the event of continued fee escalation without explanation from Etsy, she would perceive a sense of being scammed. Interviewee 12 expressed that she was

dissatisfied since in the ten years that she had been on Etsy platform that the fees had escalated tremendously. She also stated that she had attempted to leave Etsy and start her own website but discovered that this was not successful for her business and that Etsy was the main contributor for her sales online.

A few artists did cite that they would leave the Etsy platform if their business grew due to this expenditure. Some sellers even disclosed individuals from their social networks who had departed due to this. One participant furthermore mentioned that when she went to a webinar, this was one of the rationales supplied by some makers for why they had elected to depart Etsy and shift to a rival such as Shopify.

The decentralized community aspect of Etsy was something that was noted for some of the interviewees. Interviewee 11 mentioned that she had approached physical stores but that it had not been successful, while interviewee 12 had a negative experience within higher education where her art was not accepted due to it being seen as gauche. However, she had already been selling online and she realised that this academic narrative was incorrect. Interviewees 13 and 8 mentioned that their towns were either not within the niche or that the town was too small and would not be a viable option for selling their products, and thus the motivation to sell online came from physical and social parameters of the location they were living in.

The presence of inauthentic sellers tended to be a concern for certain artists who feared that while leveraging the novelty of Etsy to market their products, instances of theft could arise. Interviewee 13 disclosed that she had experienced a theft of her artwork. Consequently, she contacted Etsy to resolve the matter due to perceiving the company that committed the larceny as a corporation. She also expressed that Etsy resolved the dilemma by removing her work from the store. This case was also of interest for the specifications that it demonstrated the value of participatory culture, which is found in the preceding section, as she discovered that her artwork had been appropriated by a client who made her aware of the situation. Several artists when discussing the opportunities and threats to selling on Etsy mentioned that Etsy's credibility and its inbuilt audience were contributing factors as to why they consider selling on Etsy as they perceived the site to be a place that was safe and would protect them as sellers as well as buyers. However, some of the artists did not feel that Etsy protected them as much as they protected the clients. However, most of the interviewed artists said that they felt safe on Etsy. This highlighted



to the researcher that, for the most part, the artist considered Etsy to be a reputable distribution platform for their art.

Several artists underscored the user-friendly interface and straightforward establishment procedure of an Etsy storefront as a meritorious advantage. Similarly, some of the interviewed artists emphasized that Etsy functioned as an ideal initial platform for launching online business ambitions.

Nonetheless, a few artists mentioned that the algorithm was one of the disadvantages of operating a business on Etsy due to the nature of how time-consuming it could be to execute. Regardless, the interviewed artist did articulate that Etsy had provided them with the seller's handbook, which supplied recommendations on the management of keyword searches and tagging.

Community support and concept generation was another positive that was indicated by artists. Interviewee 1 highlighted the fact that some artists are undecided as to if they wanted to have a community or not. While interviewees 3, 7,10,11, 12 and 13 highlighted the importance of having a community. To support this, Interviewee 3 said:

It pros well, I think, just being able to reach such a vast market. And um I think also the ability to connect with other artists on the in the Etsy grouping. I've met other people you can join. They have a number of different groups that you can join. They have little seminars. you know you can participate at to whatever degree you want to be participating

Hence the researcher discerned that there were pros and cons to selling on Etsy, but for the most part, the participants articulated that they were satisfied with the Etsy platform for the promotion of their wall art and would continue to utilize it as a forum to sell and distribute their works to their audience.

#### **4.5 Artists and Client's Interactions**

Participatory culture, which suggests active engagement and easy barriers to artistic expression (Jenkins, 2009), was discovered in situations where some artists, while not actively changing or modifying created works, tended to be open to taking suggestions from their audiences. There was some evidence to suggest that community from the audience, art and familial communities played a vital role in how artists elected to sell their wall art either by

encouraging the artist to sell their works for a higher value, concept generation and feedback on their artworks.

#### **4.5.1 Connection with Audience**

Interviewee 10 made use of the Lock-in Method, where she would add in complementary products related her brand and this then fosters a sense of brand community. She also tended to do this when products were lost or damaged as an apology for the inconvenience.

While, Interviewees 10, 7 and 5 managed to create strong connections with their audiences through online interactions and allowing their clients to feel connected to them as makers. As Solga (2013) indicated, most artists would apologize for the inconvenience which ensued from the delay in the product, and most of the sellers communicated that the customer tended to be more understanding. A few artists mentioned receiving badges for a fast reply. Artists said that this was just good client service. Regardless, artists did not express uneasiness with this, as Razaq et al, (2022) implied, yet one, interviewee felt dissatisfaction with the reviews as she did not appreciate that this could diminish the number of individuals who saw her store. However, this was not the view held by most of the other artists who perceived it as positive aspect to their businesses. Interviewee 10 expressly stated that it was one of the features she appreciated about Etsy.

Most artists communicated those personal connections with their clients when they reached out with a complaint was one of the ways they diffused the tension. Some artists even suggested that once the clients realized they were negotiating with an individual artist, clients became more understanding of the circumstances. A minority of artists also underscored the fact that some of the clients appeared to assume that artists' stores were a corporation instead of a small business. Interviewee 13 expressed the following over clients not being aware of the size of the company:

It's very possible, and you know sometimes on Esty you might get somebody who didn't really look at your page. They might have just looked at that one item and just bought it, you know, really quickly. And so, from that perspective they don't know if it's like just one person, or if it's a yeah, or if it's a bigger business...

This demonstrates that clients sometimes perceive stores on Etsy as being run by corporations. Thus, a few clients are inclined to treat artists as a corporation when they reach out to complain about problems they are experiencing concerning to their purchase. However, the

artists who expressed this concern indicated that once the customer realised it was an individual running a small business, they were more understanding and personable. This links well to interviewee 3 who expressed that most clients want to be heard and that if artists do so clients seemed more receptive and satisfied with the services of the artists.

Furthermore, interviewee 8 expressed that while Etsy suited her needs better than Fiverr, she felt that Etsy system of reviewing items was something she did not understand about the premise behind the review section. This was corroborated by interviewee 7 and 5 who mentioned that one individual client had not received the product and had not told the artist who immediately refunded the product while the other artist had a client complain that a product had been damaged and had not come to her personally which she found frustrating, and she felt pressure to respond to the review. Moreover, several artists also indicated that when it came to the complaints about their art concerning damaged or delayed artworks that some of the artists would reply quickly as interviewee 3 expressed that this would frequently reduce the customers feeling of dissatisfaction, and this was echoed by a few other artists.

Furthermore, when it came to interacting with clients online, interviewee 5 mentioned that Etsy would appraise her if it were a returning customer who had purchased something from her store. She would then try to individualize the service that she gave the client by asking them about the product and thanking them for returning to her store. Thus, it could be inferred that Etsy is trying to get sellers to reward the loyalty of the returning customer. However, interviewee 1 mentioned she had an incident with one of her customers whom she observed exhibited indications of compulsive purchasing behaviours, which caused her concern. The described incident is a good illustration of negative reciprocity. Additionally, interviewee 1 expressed guilt as she perceived that the woman might have been buying from her store without the financial means to support this. Thusly, the researcher discovered that connections between several of the artists and their clients were becoming more personable when it came to conversing with their client which aligns with Yoon and colleagues' assessment that sellers and clients' interactions were going to become conversational (2008).

Handmade items provide a connection to the seller, which was discovered when it came to client relations and interactions as the artist often mentioned a feeling of happiness when one of the customers left reviews or came back for another product. Interviewee 5 mentioned that consumers want to have the aura of buying from a small business with the convenience of mass

production as she perceived this to be a social construction identity of being seen as sustainable and anti-fast production. This statement was somewhat proven by interviewee 7 who discussed her own buying behaviours when she was discussing why she elected to apply her method of printing on demand while outsourcing some of her products to a local drop-shipping entity:

Oh, I really want to buy a print of that, and then I can't. and that bothers me, or like they don't. This is something I need to get better at anyways, but like it's not readily available yet, or, you know, just like things like that, or there's just not a clear spot to buy it, and I'm like. Why, why, why, why are you missing it on this income, or they do something where they're like? DM me, if you have a purchase. I'm like, I'm not gonna do any. I just want to purchase them online, right? So, cause that's just like. So

The researcher inferred a desire for readily accessible crafts. Furthermore, customers desired authentic art, but the consumer base seemed to want the convenience of mass production. Accordingly, it was concluded that artists employing print-on-demand had effectively utilized Solga's (2013) suggestion of the assembly line to mass produce their works while maintaining the authenticity of creating an original inspired work. Nonetheless, it was deemed to be one of the negatives of operating a print-on-demand store, as clients would want immediate access to the art.

Therefore, the researcher contrived that creating connections to the client is nuanced and can be dependent on an array of factors of how the client perceives the store and to what they expect from the artists who receive their complaints.

#### **4.5.2 Artistic Expression and Engagement**

Some artists indicate that the inclusion of a review section provided a valuable source of feedback and reception on how their art and cultivated intrinsic motivation to continue to create art. Moreover, while the artists' community is not actively engaged in altering their artworks, they did provide moral support. Additionally, some artists noted that returning customers provided them a sense of joy or helped sustain their business.

Furthermore, some artists like interviewee 11 indicated that a subset of their clients were fans of their work and supported their business. In the words of Interviewee 11:

Um Yes, yeah. as of late it finally feels like my recognition is sort of venturing outside of the like. I would say the second ring of people. So, the people I know, and then the people that they know. So, it's going very much into like people I've never met that are strangers to me that that find me as well, which is it's nice. See growth in that. But it's. I think it's also a loyalty thing, and I

definitely have people that I think consider themselves my Fan and they've made more than one purchase that includes friends, whether that also includes acquaintances, or you know, just outside of that.

The researcher was able to observe that some of the customers were also fans of the artist's work, and interviews 1 and 12 echoed this. Interviewee 1 indicated that she had one individual whom she referred to as a patron with whom she would often discuss the meaning behind her creations, which provided her with a sense of connection.

Further, interviewee 13 was approached by one of her clients, who apprised her of the theft of her artwork, prompting her to bring constructive measures to resolve the case. The researcher inferred that this client was a fan of interviewee 13's work. This incident could indicate that positive engagement with the audience can provide a community of individuals who will support the artists. Moreover, this demonstrates Jenkins' (2009) appraisal of secure support for artistic creations as this audience member supported the artist by ensuring that her product remained her own. Nonetheless, interviewee 8 obtained notable encouragement from her audience to increase her fees as they perceived her work to be more valuable than what she was selling for. Additionally, one of her clients went further and forwarded her information to another client. This observation conforms to Luckman's (2020) concept concerning word-of-mouth promotion still being prized within the creative industry. It is significant to note this was not a topic communicated by other artists.

Furthermore, artists control the levels of participation they encourage when it comes to modification of their works or assimilation of concepts provided by feedback. Interviewee 3 mentioned that she would receive suggestions for animals to paint. She would find a way to incorporate them into her paintings, thus aligning with how artists can maintain their authenticity while providing a product that the consumer base will purchase. However, interviewee 5 mentioned that she felt obligated to create art that her audience would enjoy. Thus, we observe the implications of creative process levels of authenticity being destroyed by having to consider consumer tastes. Interviewee 2 mentioned that she had created acrylic artwork with customers' recommendations. Although the art was purchased, she admitted she did not enjoy the process. Hence while participatory culture can be a valuable source of inspiration, it can also cause an unpleasant reaction for the artists. Lüneburg (2018) suggested that one of the requirements for this be a positive and fulfilling experience, artists need to negotiate how to maintain their

authenticity while implementing recommendations. A positive example was observed with interviewee 12, who voiced that a family member had asked her to draw a cat and that this had inspired a new series for her art. Therefore, the researcher noted that when the artist embraces suggestions that align with their creative method can lead to potentially fulfilling experiences for both the artists and the clients.

Nonetheless, interviewees 2, 3, 7 and 8 also indicated that they also sought support for their art and their business from other creators through participation in webinars where makers discussed their experiences of being a maker online or through community forums where ideas could be shared on running an art store or sharing creations. Interviewee 7 highlighted that she had gone to a fair organised by Etsy where makers could meet. She also indicated that she had gone for art lessons to improve her art and had maintained a relationship with her art teacher, and they would sometimes meet to create together. Thus, artists' professional communities can also assist in artistic expression and business advice, which could be helpful to artists as it provides a place to receive information to better their stores.

Hence, the researcher found that engagement in the artistic process can be rewarding when done well but could be negative if the artists are not cognisant of maintaining their authenticity while incorporating the audience's concepts. However, the researcher also discovered that community support was significant to some artists, as it provided them with a sense of community and support for concept generation.

## 5. Conclusion

During the disposition of this master's thesis, an exhaustive exploration was embarked on to answer the thesis question: How do artists sell their wall art on Etsy? The objective was to gain a deep understanding of various elements: including the artist's motivations, how they elected their business models, and how they managed clients. The researcher discovered that business models catered to the needs and requirements of the artists.

Amidst the study, it was discovered that some artists applied their methods of authenticity delineation due to the nature of exclusively selling singular and authentic wall art. Additionally, other artists established authentication through methods of controlling prints and creating unique content.

The following methodological selections were made concerning the research conducted on this thesis. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen female artists to explore how artists sell their wall art on Etsy. For this research, this method of research proved invaluable for a variety of reasons (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013).

The first reason for the presented methodology of qualitative semi-structured interviews was that it allowed for the collection of idiographic and in-depth information on the experiences of artists selling on the Etsy e-commerce platform. Via 13 interviews with the participants, the researcher was able to research detailed insights into the shared experiences of artists and the strategies, challenges, and their achievements as they used Etsy as an online marketplace to sell their art (Bryman, 2012; Swain, 2018). The employment of semi-structured interviews provided an open-ended situation for the artists to articulate their perceptions, emotions, and thoughts on the Etsy platform, consequently contributing to an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the artist's perspective when it arrived to selling their wall art on Etsy (Bryman, 2012; Swain, 2018).

Secondly, the method applied to this research employed a thematic analysis to examine the interviews (Bryman, 2012; Swain, 2018). Analysing data thematically provides a means of identifying patterns and themes within the given data. Upon applying this analytical strategy to the interview transcriptions, the researcher discovered and interpreted emerging themes that recurred throughout the interviews. Thematic analysis permitted the researcher to perceive the shared experiences between artists. Utilizing the mentioned strategy enabled an insightful exploration of how artists sell their wall art on Etsy. This revealed how complex and nuanced their artistic practices are (Bryman, 2012; Swain, 2018).

Lastly, the researcher elected this method, as it was deliberated to be the most beneficial to the conducted research due to the abovementioned topics. However, there are limitations in performing this form of research, and it would be remiss not to elaborate on this.

The theoretical insights of authenticity in crafts and online selling illuminated how artists define their artworks as authentic. It explores the effect of mass production on authenticity. It also gives insights into the Traditionalization and Otherizing of products (Koontz, 2010). This provides an understanding of how artists distinguished their work from others. By identifying the six modes, presented by Thurnell (2019), it was possible to gain a meaningful interpretation of how artists present their work as authentic to their clients. This theory delivered a profound understanding of how artists produced authenticity for their clients. Amidst the study, it was discovered that some artists applied their methods of authenticity delineation due to the nature of exclusively selling singular and authentic wall art. Additionally, other artists established authentication through methods of controlling prints and creating unique content.

Artists often applied authenticity as a selling point for their art. It was observed that authenticity and the perception of creating a unique art piece were significant to the process, with some artists expressing that they had not seen any artworks like theirs. Nevertheless, how artists went about defining the authenticity of their work was different based on the business models they employed. Consequently, with original artworks, the artists would often highlight the point of exclusivity and being a singular creation. While with methods such as print-on-demand and digital downloads controlling the printing process became a form of creating authenticity. While artists applying this method would often be more concerned with how their clients perceived the experience. Hence it came to be seen that artists utilize authenticity and the desire for authenticity to sell their work.

Secondly, the theoretical insights on the role of artists as sellers proved advantageous concerning selling art online. It explained the benefits and risks of selling online. Further, it permitted the researcher to understand the complexities of the algorithm and how it affects artists' visibility online (Klawitter and Hargittai's, 2018). This theory allowed for the discovery of strategies utilized by artists to promote and manage their stores and gain success on Etsy.

The section of being artists online discovered the motivations for selling online. Numerous reasons were proffered, by artists, while it was observed that the principal perception was to reach the right audience for their wall art. Some artists also underscored the geographical



loci as a rationale for their election to sell online. However, the reasons for this varied. A few artists communicated the rural nature of their homes, and others articulated that their wall art would not fit the niche of their locations. Thus, selling their wall art online was the ideal place to discover the correct audience to purchase their art.

As for the election of business models, artists expressed that their chosen business model suited their needs and requirements. Another reason for artists' elected business models was linked to selling authenticity for those who sold original works. Artists' election of print-on-demand was connected to the convenience of printing their artworks numerous times, thus creating a stable income. Further, some artists employing this method indicated that not having to keep inventory was part of the reasoning for choosing print-on-demand. Digital downloads as a business model were determined by some artists as there were no related shipping fees and suited their situations. Therefore, business models aligned with what the artists chose to sell and their authenticity strategy. However, the artist's strategies suited them as individuals. This allowed for optimal selling for themselves and their business.

In the section on artists and marketers, branding was found to be significant for drawing clients to their stores as it was seen as a mark of quality for their artworks. Furthermore, their marketing strategies of utilizing social media drew clients to their stores via methods such as store drops which informed their clients that they were launching a new product. The employment of free branded products was a good marketing strategy to make their clients feel valued. The concept of marketing strategies employed by artists proved crucial to their success online as it did bring in sales to their stores through the correct keywords being applied to their art to the employment of social media to lure in more clients.

Concerning the pros and cons of selling on Etsy, the artists stated, for the most part, that while not dissatisfied with the fees, they would appreciate it if Etsy were transparent about the commission taken. While the benefits of selling on Etsy was mainly attributed to be Esty in-built audience along with Etsy providing a space to sell their wall art.

Consequently, this brings forth the need to be well versed in the application of SEO tools. This will be one of the crucial factors for ensuring the correct audience sees their work and how to successfully sell their art (Klawitter and Hargittai, 2018). The concept of the algorithm as marketing strategies employed by artists proved crucial to their success online as it did bring in

sales to their stores through the correct keywords being applied to their art to the employment of social media to lure in more clients.

Finally, the theoretical insights of Participatory culture methods supplied valuable acuity into the relationship between artists and their clients (Jenkins, 2009). It elucidated how much involvement artists permitted their clients within their creation process and underscored the importance of support structures (Lüneburg, 2018). The theory provides an understanding of the balance artists created to maintain authenticity while satiating the clients' preferences. The artists and client interactions emerged as a significant element, particularly concerning the management of complaints. Some artists indicated the significance of ensuring the clients felt heard and valued in these interactions. Artists noted that apologising for the inconvenience and refunding or replacing the artwork was vital for maintaining a good relationship with their customers.

The review section was yet another area where artists discovered the receptions toward their artworks. Many of the artists expressed that they appreciated being able to receive feedback. While one artist mentioned that she did not like the review section as it could reduce the number of customers her store received.

A handful of artists expressed control over the levels of engagement that they permitted in their artworks. However, a few artists highlighted that this is an intricate balance as they needed to negotiate how to maintain authenticity within their works while satiating their clients' desires for their artwork (Lüneburg, 2018).

Professional support was also vital to the success of artists online as this provided artists with assistance when it came to running their businesses via webinars, forums, and art lessons. This assisted the artists with improving and operating their businesses on the Etsy platform.

Therefore, how artists sell their wall art on Etsy is a complex and nuanced discussion, and the researcher would indicate that the artist needs to apprehend their personal goals for their businesses as well as identify what they perceive makes their wall art authentic.

The limitations of the presented research come from several factors. The first consideration was that qualitative research depends on the researcher for its meaning. Moreover, the researcher did everything in their power to ensure valid results (Bryman, 2012; Swain, 2018).

The second constraint of this research was that it was not generalisable due to it being connected to its temporal context and the fact that the sample of thirteen participants is not a

significant enough sample to compare to the general population. This master's thesis is therefore based on the perspectives of thirteen female artists selling on Etsy (Bryman, 2012; Swain, 2018).

Lastly, the researcher had a limited amount of time in which to finalise this thesis and attempted to ensure the accuracy and validity of the result along with the constraint of the length of the master's thesis, which meant selecting information from the interview transcripts that the researcher perceived and studied to be the best reflection and answer to the research question (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2013).

Several possibilities for future research into the conception of this thesis could be developed in future, hence several concepts for future research emerged. Firstly, it would be required to conduct a comparative analysis based on the geographical locations of artists since the performed examination suggests that artists' geographical location might influence their success online. Further research into artists from low-income regions using Etsy as a platform to sell their art would be necessary since the Etsy platform, by appearances, does not cater for these geographical loci, and it would be stimulating to observe what artists deliberate on what can be achieved to progress this position. Yet another point of interest would be to persist with this research but to elaborate on it with a quantitative methodology, in particular, the use of surveys to obtain a profound knowledge of Etsy as a platform for creatives and how these artists perceive the Etsy forum process and policies work for the required prerequisite for selling wall art.

In conclusion, after assessing the number of facets presented throughout this master's thesis, it becomes apparent that artists selling online have numerous routes available to enrich their sales on Etsy. The findings articulate the significance of individualisation and personalising strategies to aid the specific requirements of individual artists' unique circumstances.

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**Appendix A: Participant information**

Participants	Type of wall art	Education/ Occupation	Type of interview	Duration of interview	Location	Date
1	Acrylic paintings	Trained Artist Part time work/ Full time artist at the moment	Zoom	1 hour 17 minuets	Canada	14:00 8/03/2023
2	Acrylic Painting / Interdisciplinary	Self-taught artist Diversity and Inclusion manger	Zoom	1 hour 3 minuets	United States	17:00 17/03/2023
3	Oil painting and prints	Trained artist with qualifications in English literature and Victorian literature	Zoom	53 minuets	Canada	20/03/2023
4	Digital/ original paintings	Trained Artist	Zoom	1 hour	Sweden	14:00 28/03/2023
5	Prints/ physical	PA/ Educated in Fine Arts Trained Artist	Zoom	1 hour 12 minuets	United Kingdom	19:56 28/03/2023
6	Prints/ physical	Art studio owner Interpreter and translator, art course	Zoom	59 minutes 35 seconds	Italy	14:00 30/03/2023
7	Prints/ other/ original art	Self-taught artist Full time artist Degree in science: kinesiologist university laboratories and worked with the recruitment	Zoom	1 hour 15 seconds	Canada	16:00 30/03/2023
8	Digital	Trained artist Visual affects course	Zoom	1 hour 10 minuets	India	11:30 4/04/2023
9		Trained artist	Zoom	41minutes ,21 seconds	Netherlands	7/04/2023
10	Print on demand	Trained artist / Art Education student	Zoom	1 hour 34 minuets	Netherlands	10:00 19/04/2023
11	Print on demand	Journalism and Trained artist	Zoom	1 hour 7 minuets	Netherlands	11:00 20/04/2023

12	Print on demand, digital and physical	Trained artist Upholstery education graphics design and fine art school and then Project management for video games degree	Zoom	1 hour 46 minuet	France	14:00 20/04/2023
13	Print on demand/ physical	Trained artist graphics designer and English literature degree	Zoom	1 hour 1 minuet	United states	14/04/2023

**Appendix B: Interview guide**

Topics	Questions
Background information/ introduction	1. Can you tell me a bit about your background? 1.1. Age, occupation, family etc. 1.2. What is your education?
	2. How would you describe your lifestyle. 2.1 are there subcultures you consider yourself to be a part of?
	3.1 is selling on ETSY your only source of income?
Topic 1: Artist Motivations	
	4.1 How did you discover ETSY?
	Why did you start your store
	4.2 What motivated you to use ETSY to sell your wall art?
	4.3 Why did you choose to sell your art online
	4.4 How do you feel about the commission ETSY takes from items that have been sold.
	What would you say are the pros and cons for selling on ETSY
Topic 2: Artist Marketing and Product Management strategies	
	What kind of business model did you choose for your wall art (Print on demand, digital download or Physical)
	How did you choose your method

	How important is branding for your store
	Do you use ETSY Advertisements
	Do you have any social media accounts to drive business to your site?
Topic 3: Client interaction and relation	
	Has your wall art ever been modified because of a comment from a client?
	How do you manage your client when they approach you with a complaint on the product
	Who is your target audience
	How do you relate to your customers
	Do you think ETSY protects producers and consumers