



## Digital Platforms and Art Practice: Innovative Paradigm Shift for Nigerian Visual Artists

OYENIKE ESEAGWU  
University of Lagos

ALEXANDER K. EKEAMADI  
Yaba College of Technology, Lagos

**Abstract.** The delay in the sale of artworks due to various factors presents a significant challenge for art practice in Nigeria. With both local and global exhibitions taking place, many artists find themselves with unsold works accumulating in their studios, galleries and storage spaces. This issue represents not only a waste of time, materials and energy but also results in the inefficient use of valuable space. While some artists have turned to digital platforms as a means to market and sell these works, they face additional obstacles, such as the difficulty in protecting their original concepts, further delays and the high commissions charged by third-party websites that facilitate sales. This paper examines the extent to which digital platforms are being utilized by studio artists and visual art students in Nigeria. A mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, to investigate these challenges are employed. Data was collected through surveys from 50 studio artists and visual art students in Nigeria, using purposive sampling. The findings indicate that although most local artists are yet to explore digital platforms for art sales, younger studio artists and art students, particularly those in tertiary institutions, are more inclined to explore digital platforms for merchandising their works. The study concludes that as digital technologies gain wider acceptance in art practice and merchandise, there is a pressing need for visual art institutions, prominent art galleries and professional bodies to establish their own websites. Such initiatives could reduce the reliance on middlemen, lower commission charges and enhance visibility for artists, thereby fostering better connections with art collectors and patrons to boost sales. The study highlights the importance of digital marketing skills for all categories of studio artists and art students, emphasizing that proficiency in these areas is crucial for navigating the evolving art market and ensuring the sustainable commercialization of their works.

**Keywords:** Digital platforms, art practice, visual art, innovative paradigm shift.

### 1. Background of the study

The phrase "art practice" describes a scenario where the artist typically works as a freelancer under either short-term or long-term contracts (Broderick, 2011). Art practice has embraced the efficiency that comes with the use of digital technology to enhance the execution and sales of art. The term "digital revolution" describes the profound change in how people interact with information, communicate and work those results from the widespread use of digital technology and information systems (Hilbert, 2020). The digital revolution has driven significant changes in the worldwide art industry in recent years (Zhao et al, 2024). The marketing, distribution and consumption of artworks need to be redesigned to leverage on the advent of the internet and the growth of online platforms (Tang, 2022). Despite these developments, many studio artists still face ongoing difficulties with art commercialisation, especially in poor countries such as Nigeria and sundry other African countries. The amassing of unsold artworks in studios, galleries and storage facilities has been partly facilitated by the exorbitant expenses linked to physical displays, shifting market demands and the restricted reach of local art markets. In addition to the wasteful use of physical space, this situation represents a substantial drain on time and financial resources.

In response to these enduring challenges, a growing number of artists are turning to digital platforms as a potential alternative for promoting and selling their works (Petrides et al, 2024). Yet, the adoption of digital tools within the Nigerian art ecosystem has been uneven, often hindered by structural and infrastructural barriers. Artists encounter various obstacles, such as high commissions imposed by third-

party platforms, transactional delays and concerns about the protection of their intellectual property. Furthermore, for many Nigerian artists—particularly those from older generations—the technological proficiency required to effectively engage with digital platforms remains a significant hurdle.

However, the widespread adoption of social media, personal websites and digital marketplaces has expanded opportunities for artists to access broader audiences, transcending the geographic limitations of local art scenes. Despite this growing interest, the digital art market in Nigeria remains nascent and underdeveloped, with a lack of institutional support further exacerbating the challenges faced by artists. This sets the tone for the urgent need to fully embrace the opportunities presented by digitalization. Art institutions, prominent galleries, and professional bodies have a crucial role to play in developing digital platforms that can serve as dedicated spaces for the promotion and sale of locally produced art. Such platforms could alleviate artists' dependence on external intermediaries, reduce commission fees and enhance the visibility of artists in global markets. Additionally, the integration of digital marketing strategies into art education curricula would equip emerging artists with the necessary skills to navigate the rapidly evolving digital art landscape.

This study seeks to explore the extent to which digital platforms are being utilized by studio artists and art students in Nigeria, focusing on the challenges and barriers they face. By employing a mixed-method research approach, the paper aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the digital transformation of the art market, particularly within the Nigerian context. The study highlights the imperative of equipping artists with digital skills and fostering institutional support to ensure the sustainable commercialization of artworks in an increasingly digitized global art economy.

### 1.1 Theoretical Frameworks

**Theoretical Connections: Rogers, 1962's Diffusion of Innovation Theory:** Based on how they use new technologies, this idea divides people into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

Davis (1989) developed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which Perceived utility and ease of use are important elements that impact technology adoption, according to TAM.

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour: According to Ajzen's theory, attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived behavioural control all have an impact on intentions, which in turn drive behaviour. The efficacy of internet platforms, exorbitant commission costs, or logistical challenges may influence artists' opinions about them.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Artist Role in Art Merchandise

The conceptualization of artists as entrepreneurs, managers, and brand managers has been increasingly prevalent in contemporary literature (Poorsoltan, 2012; Fillis, 2015; Fernandes & Afonso, 2014). These roles extend beyond traditional artistic creation, incorporating skills in business management and marketing, essential for career success in today's competitive art market. Fillis (2015) argues that the entrepreneurial mindset enables artists to identify and capitalize on opportunities, navigate financial aspects, and manage self-promotion. Poorsoltan (2012) supports this, noting that an entrepreneurial approach helps artists overcome market entry barriers and fosters innovation. Furthermore, Schroeder (2005), Muñiz et al. (2014) and Rodner and Kerrigan (2014) emphasize that successful artists act as brand managers, cultivating an identity that resonates with audiences and differentiates them in a crowded market. By managing their brand, artists not only enhance visibility but also establish a consistent narrative that attracts collectors and buyers. Although notable artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya, El Anatsui, Kolade Oshinowo, Jerry Buhari and Njideka Akunyili Crosby among many others have distinct strokes and artistic styles that distinguish their art brands, digital presence allows artists to disseminate their work leveraging platforms such as social media for visibility and reach (Griffith et al., 2021). This branding function aligns with Aaker's (1996) brand identity theory, which suggests that a strong, cohesive brand narrative influences consumer perception and loyalty. In a similar vein, Schroeder (2005) notes that branding helps artists attract work opportunities and drive sales by establishing an emotional connection with followers.

### 2.2 Digital Presence as a Necessity for Artists

Digital presence has become essential for artists, driven by social media's role in reshaping interactions within the art world (Forbes, 2019). Unlike traditional methods, digital platforms enable artists to bypass gatekeepers, allowing them to build audiences without reliance on gallery representation or exhibition

acceptance (Dawson, 2020). Instagram, in particular, is a dominant platform where images take precedence over text, making it ideal for visual artists. According to Griffith et al. (2021), Instagram offers a visually rich format that encourages engagement and connection, fostering a community that traditional text-based interactions lack. Artists can now share their creative processes, behind-the-scenes content, and finished works directly with potential clients, which has democratized the art industry by providing artists with a direct line to collectors and audiences. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the reliance on digital channels. With physical galleries and exhibitions temporarily inaccessible, artists turned to online platforms to maintain visibility and sales (Sutton, 2021). As physical boundaries became irrelevant, artists reached audiences globally, challenging the traditional, geographically constrained art markets. This shift aligns with network theory, which postulates that digital platforms provide structures that enable individuals to reach a vast number of connections and potential clients (Castells, 2004). Through network theory, one can understand how artists leverage digital media to create and maintain ties with distant collectors and fellow creators.

### **2.3 Social Media as an Art Marketplace**

The shift of art events to digital platforms has changed the landscape for artists, collectors, and galleries. Social networking platforms, particularly Instagram, emerged as crucial tools for marketing and sales, offering artists a “virtual gallery” to display their work. According to McAndrew (2021), Instagram became a primary tool for art collectors, with one-third finding artworks through the platform or links provided on it. McAndrew’s (2022) follow-up study reveals that Instagram remains a key channel for collectors, underlining its continued importance in the art industry. Instagram’s role as a marketplace is supported by the visual-centric nature of the platform, which aligns with visual artists’ needs to showcase their work effectively. The platform’s features, such as Stories, Reels, and direct messaging, allow artists to engage their audience, gather feedback, and even close sales in real-time. This supports Dawson’s (2020) argument that social media platforms, by reducing dependency on traditional intermediaries, empower artists to maintain control over their market engagement and create brand loyalty directly with consumers.

### **2.4 Challenges Faced by Digital Creators**

Despite the advantages, digital platforms present challenges that impact the sustainability of artists’ careers. The rise of the “creator economy” has led to an increase in the demand for content, often marginalizing art projects that require more time and depth (Chayka, 2021). The necessity for frequent content posting to maintain visibility often leaves artists unable to invest time in long-term projects, pushing them toward faster, potentially less meaningful output (Ables, 2019). This phenomenon, described as the “content treadmill,” creates pressure on artists to prioritize quantity over quality to stay relevant in the fast-paced digital landscape. The content treadmill aligns with Bordieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital, which suggests that cultural goods gain value through scarcity and differentiation. By pushing artists to produce more frequently, digital platforms may be devaluing artistic works by reducing their uniqueness and perceived worth. Additionally, Levordashka et al. (2021) argue that creators need to provide interactive content to foster community engagement, a requirement that may detract from an artist’s traditional studio practice and creative process.

### **2.5 Digital Platforms as Conduits for Art Sales**

The digital art market has expanded significantly, with platforms like Saatchi Art, Artsy, and Artnet serving as major sales channels. These platforms allow collectors to access art beyond their physical locations, lowering barriers of entry and making art acquisition more approachable (Lee & Lee, 2019). According to McAndrew (2021), digital platforms became especially popular with collectors during the pandemic as they circumvented the intimidating nature of galleries. However, these platforms come with certain disadvantages, particularly the high commission fees, often ranging from 30% to 50%, which may deter some artists from listing their work online. According to Poorsoltan (2012), these fees cut into artists’ revenues, reducing their overall profit margin. Additionally, the platform algorithms may prioritize commercially viable or popular art, creating visibility biases and marginalizing lesser-known artists. This limitation aligns with Granovetter’s (1973) “strength of weak ties” theory, which suggests that platforms might emphasize connections that foster broad, mainstream appeal, often to the detriment of niche artists who rely on personalized connections for sales.

### **2.6 The Emergence of Digital Creators and the Role of Collectors**

The emergence of the “creator” as a category within digital markets has introduced new dynamics to art consumption. Visual artists, along with podcasters,

bloggers, and other creators, are monetizing their online activity as part of the creator economy (Chayka, 2021). The Dutch illustrator Lois Van Baarle exemplifies this trend, utilizing Instagram’s algorithm to maximize visibility through frequent, small-sized content (Ables, 2019). Van Baarle’s strategy highlights the shift towards algorithm-driven visibility, where success is tied to understanding and leveraging digital metrics. Collectors have adapted to these new dynamics as well. McAndrew (2021) points out that collectors are increasingly inclined to explore and purchase art through digital channels, attracted by the convenience and accessibility these platforms provide. With the rise in the use of social media, some collectors are bypassing traditional galleries, reducing

the “intimidation factor” and making art acquisition feel more personalized and direct (Lee & Lee, 2019). This shift in collector behaviour has encouraged artists to maintain an active digital presence to capture this growing online market segment.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research made use of survey methods and review of sold arts in the online platforms. Through purposive sampling method, 50 visual artists participated in the survey. The questions asked and the corresponding responses are presented in the charts and analysis below.

### 4. Findings

#### Non-Users of Digital Platforms:



If you do not sell your art through online platforms, why? (Select all that apply)

50 responses

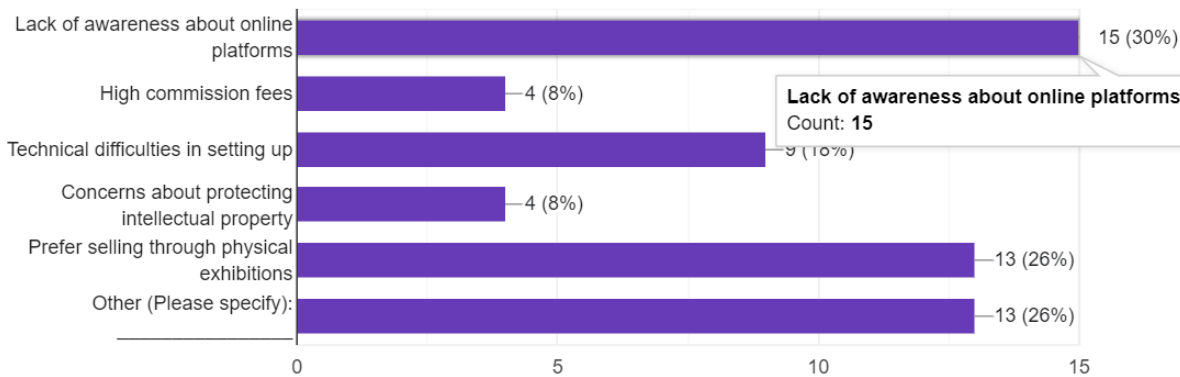


Chart 1: Reasons artists are yet to fully explore digital platforms for art sales. Source: the researchers.

The chart illustrates the reasons why some Nigerian visual artists may not be utilizing online platforms for selling their artwork. Below is a critical analysis of the data presented:

#### Key Insights from Chart 1:

**Lack of Awareness about Online Platforms (30%):** The most cited reason for not using online platforms is a lack of awareness, with 15 respondents (30%) indicating this. This suggests a significant information gap in the Nigerian art community regarding the potential of digital platforms for artwork merchandising. According to McAndrew (2021), awareness is a crucial determinant of adoption in any new technology or system, and this lack of awareness could explain why many Nigerian artists have yet to explore online sales options.

**Technical Difficulties in Setting Up (18%):** Nine respondents (18%) stated that they face challenges in setting up digital platforms. This could be attributed to limited digital literacy among some artists or the complexity of some online platforms. As observed by Sidorova (2020), many emerging economies still grapple with poor technological infrastructure, making digital onboarding cumbersome for less tech-savvy users. Nigerian artists may benefit from training or simpler onboarding processes offered by the platforms.

**Preference for Physical Exhibitions (26%):** Thirteen respondents (26%) expressed a preference for traditional physical exhibitions over digital sales platforms. This preference highlights a cultural attachment to in-person engagement and physical spaces, which are traditionally viewed as integral to art sales. The literature, such as Candlin & Guins (2019),

emphasizes the value of physical exhibitions in fostering direct interactions between the artist and collectors. However, it also suggests that artists should adapt to hybrid models of marketing to survive in an increasingly digital world.

**Concerns about Protecting Intellectual Property (8%):** Intellectual property concerns were raised by 4 respondents (8%). This is a legitimate challenge for artists who worry about their works being copied or misappropriated online. Sidorova (2020) explains that safeguarding intellectual property is a significant deterrent for many creators when engaging with digital marketplaces, particularly in countries with weaker intellectual property laws and enforcement mechanisms.

**High Commission Fees (8%):** Another challenge noted by 8% of respondents is the high commission fees charged by third-party platforms. According to Thompson (2015), commission structures on many online platforms can be prohibitive, particularly for emerging artists. In Nigeria, where the purchasing power may already be lower than in Western countries, these commissions can significantly reduce the profits made by artists.

**Other Reasons (26%):** The “Other” category, chosen by 26% of respondents, suggests additional, unspecified barriers to adopting digital platforms. These may include unreliable internet access, limited digital marketing knowledge, or even skepticism about the efficacy of online sales in the Nigerian context. Research by Rosenberg and Getz (2020) indicates that while digital sales are growing globally, barriers specific to local contexts can hinder adoption in emerging markets.

**Implications:**

The data highlights the need for better outreach, digital education and training initiatives to help local artists effectively transition to online sales platforms. As McAndrew (2021) notes, the digital art market is expanding rapidly, and artists who do not embrace online platforms may miss out on critical opportunities. Furthermore, galleries, educational institutions, and art bodies in Nigeria should work collaboratively to reduce barriers by providing support and building awareness about the benefits of online platforms.

**What challenges have you faced when selling artworks through online/digital platforms? (Select all that apply)**



50 responses

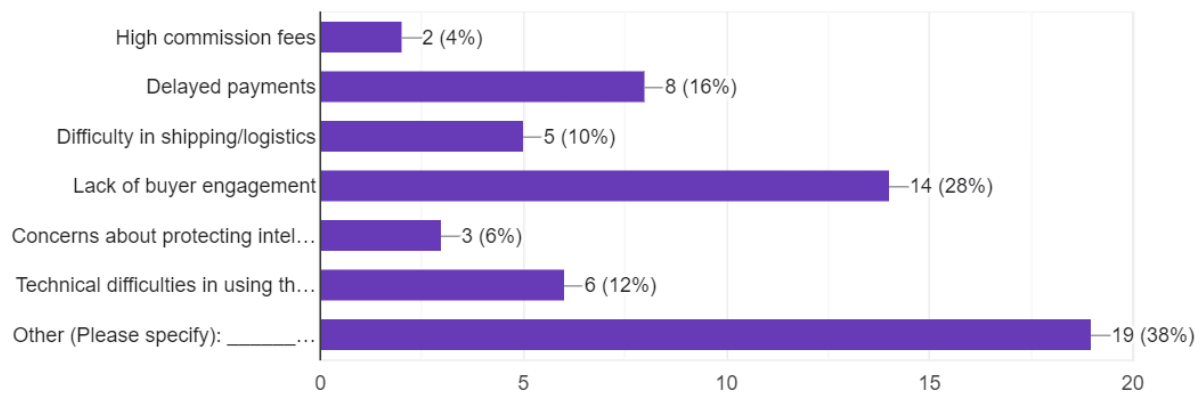


Chart 2: Analysis of difficulties in selling artworks online. Source: The researchers

The above chart offers a detailed breakdown of the challenges faced by the respondents when selling artworks through online/digital platforms. The data is based on responses from 50 artists, highlighting a variety of barriers to successful online art merchandise.

**Analysis of the findings provided in Chart 2:**

**"Other" Challenges (38%):** The most commonly cited category is "Other," chosen by 19 respondents (38%). This category likely represents a diverse range of unlisted issues that artists may face but were not explicitly named in the survey. These could include problems such as lack of trust in digital transactions, low internet access or quality, and

difficulties in gaining visibility in saturated online marketplaces. According to O'Reilly & Brown (2020), unlisted challenges in such surveys often encompass subjective experiences such as distrust in digital platforms or cultural biases toward in-person sales over online interactions.

**Lack of Buyer Engagement (28%):** Fourteen respondents (28%) reported a lack of buyer engagement as a significant issue. This suggests that while digital platforms provide an opportunity to showcase works, the interaction with potential buyers remains limited. According to McAndrew (2021), one of the major challenges artists face in the digital age is the competition for attention in an increasingly crowded online art market. Without effective strategies to drive engagement, artists may struggle to convert viewership into sales.

**Delayed Payments (16%):** Eight respondents (16%) have encountered delayed payments. This is a serious issue, as delayed payments can severely affect the cash flow of artists, many of whom rely on sales to fund future projects. Oguamanam (2019) emphasizes that financial insecurity is a prevalent challenge for creatives in Nigeria, and delayed payments only exacerbate this insecurity. In an online context, it may stem from platform policies, intermediary delays, or issues with digital payment systems.

**Technical Difficulties in Using the Platforms (12%):** Six respondents (12%) expressed concerns about technical difficulties when using digital platforms. These issues could range from user interface complications to inadequate digital literacy on the part of the artists. Sidorova (2020) points out that one of the barriers to e-commerce in developing countries is often the complexity of digital tools and a lack of user-friendly interfaces, especially for non-tech-savvy individuals. This can deter artists from fully utilizing the potential of online platforms for selling their work.

**Difficulty in Shipping/Logistics (10%):** Five respondents (10%) mentioned difficulties in shipping or logistics, which highlights the challenges associated with delivering artworks, especially large or fragile items, to distant buyers. The infrastructure in Nigeria for efficient logistics can be underdeveloped, contributing to this challenge. According to Nwagbara & Ugorji (2020), logistics infrastructure is a major bottleneck for the expansion of e-commerce in Nigeria, with issues ranging from unreliable shipping companies to high costs of packaging and delivery.

**Concerns About Protecting Intellectual Property (6%):** Intellectual property concerns were cited by 6% of respondents (3 respondents). This reflects a valid fear that their artwork might be plagiarized or misused once it is publicly available online. In Nigeria, the enforcement of intellectual property rights is still evolving, and the lack of stringent regulations can make digital sales risky for artists. This concern has been documented by Tashobya (2021), who notes that many artists avoid online platforms due to the fear of having their work stolen or replicated without due credit.

**High Commission Fees (4%):** Two respondents (4%) pointed out high commission fees as a significant issue. This aligns with findings in the broader digital art space, where commission fees can be prohibitively high, especially for emerging artists. Thompson (2015) notes that some platforms can take as much as 30%-50% of a sale, reducing the artist's profit margin considerably. In Nigeria, where the cost of living and production can already be a challenge, such fees can make online sales less attractive.

### **Broader Implications:**

The data suggests that while digital platforms offer a viable avenue for local artists to reach a global audience, several structural and operational challenges impede their ability to maximize this potential. Issues like low buyer engagement, delayed payments and logistics difficulties can discourage artists from relying solely on online platforms. Further, without sufficient protection of intellectual property and lower commission fees, artists may not feel adequately incentivized to sell their works online.

### How frequently do you sell artworks through these platforms?



45 responses

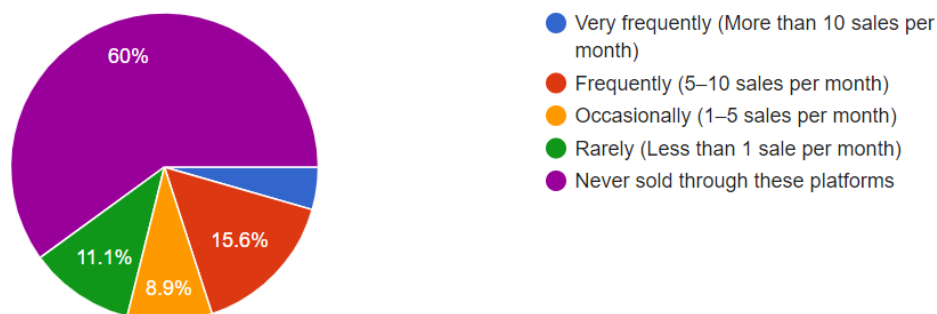


Chart 3: Percentage of local Artists who currently patronize digital platforms for sales of art. Source: the researchers

The above pie chart highlights different levels of engagement, which reveals important insights into artists' usage patterns on online platforms. What is significantly pertinent is that the majority of the local artists are yet to sell a single work via online platforms.

#### Breakdown of the Data:

**Never Sold Through Platforms (63%):** The majority of respondents (63%) reported that they have never sold any artwork through these platforms. This suggests that there is a significant portion of artists who either do not engage with digital platforms or are yet to make a successful sale. This might reflect issues such as a lack of digital literacy, poor visibility in online marketplaces, or mistrust in digital channels. In line with Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (1962), these respondents could be considered “laggards,” individuals who are resistant to adopting new technologies or innovations, in this case, digital platforms for art sales.

**Frequent Users (5-10 Sales per Month) (14.8%):** A notable percentage of respondents (14.8%) sell artworks frequently, indicating that these platforms are effective for a smaller proportion of artists. These artists are likely to be more digitally savvy and engaged, benefiting from higher buyer interaction and understanding of the digital marketplace. According to Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), users adopt technology when they perceive it as useful and easy to use. These frequent users are likely those who have seen tangible benefits from online platforms, having mastered how to optimize the technology for their business.

**Occasional and Rare Sales (18.6%):** A combined 18.6% (9.3% for each category) of respondents sell occasionally (1-5 sales per month) or rarely (less than 1 sale per month). These groups likely represent individuals who have a basic understanding of digital platforms but have not fully committed to or optimized their use. This can be explained by Innovation Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1962), where these individuals may be classified as “early majority” or “late majority,” exploring digital sales but encountering challenges such as visibility issues, high competition, or poor engagement.

**Very Frequent Users (More Than 10 Sales per Month) (0%):** Interestingly, there are no respondents in the “very frequently” category. This lack of very high engagement may indicate systemic barriers such as platform inefficiencies, limited audience reach, or even inadequate marketing strategies by the artists. In terms of the Resource-Based View (RBV) of strategic management, these artists might be limited by the specific resources required for digital sales success—such as technical know-how, effective marketing strategies, and digital visibility—impeding their ability to scale their online sales.

8. Does your institution provide digital learning facilities (e.g., computer labs, e-libraries, digital classrooms)?

34 responses

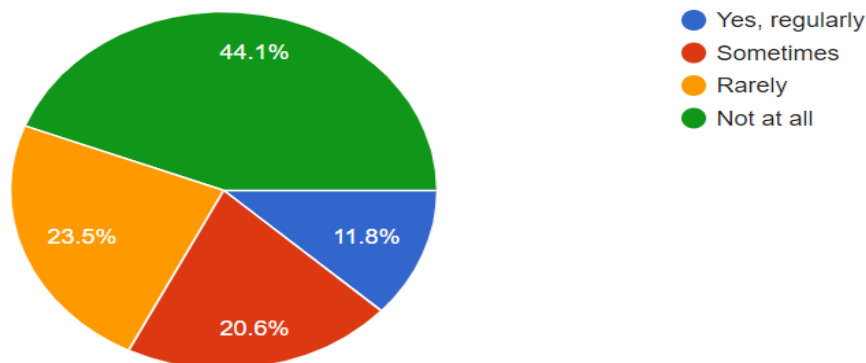


Chart 4: Availability of online facilities for art students in Nigeria schools. Source: Researchers.

Chart 4 shows responses to a question about the availability of digital learning facilities in institutions, including computer labs, e-libraries and digital classrooms. Out of 34 responses:

44.1% indicated that their institutions do not provide these digital learning facilities at all.

23.5% said these facilities are rarely available.

20.6% mentioned they are available sometimes.

Only 11.8% reported that these facilities are provided regularly.

**5. Analysis of Findings**

This data suggests that digital learning infrastructure is lacking or inconsistent across many institutions. With nearly half of the respondents (44.1%) indicating no access to digital facilities, students might face limitations in digital literacy, particularly concerning knowledge of online platforms and digital marketplaces. This lack of exposure could hinder students' understanding of e-commerce in the art world, including the limitations and challenges of selling art online.

**Linking Digital Facility Access to Awareness of Selling Sculptural Works Online**

The scarcity of digital learning facilities may also limit students' awareness of practical issues associated with online art sales, such as the challenges of selling heavy sculptural works. Online platforms are typically designed for ease of shipping and standard transactions, which can make selling large or heavy sculptures complicated and expensive due to high shipping and handling costs. In this context, students

with limited access to digital resources may be less aware of these intricacies. Without regular access to digital learning facilities, students might not fully understand the logistical, financial, and environmental implications of selling heavy sculptures online. They may miss opportunities to explore alternative platforms or learn strategies to manage these challenges, such as using local marketplaces, implementing a pick-up-only policy, or exploring specialized platforms that cater to large-scale artworks. The limited digital infrastructure could, therefore, contribute to a lack of enlightenment among students about the specific demerits and logistical complexities of using online platforms to sell physically demanding works, such as sculptures. Enhanced access to digital resources, alongside structured learning on the digital art marketplace, could improve students' strategic thinking and equip them with practical knowledge to navigate the digital art economy effectively.

**6. Discussion**

From the findings presented, several emerging themes highlight both the opportunities and challenges faced by art students and artists navigating digital platforms and learning environments.

**6.1 Digital Infrastructure and Access Inequality**

A prominent theme is the disparity in access to digital learning facilities, as nearly half of the respondents reported no access to digital infrastructure such as computer labs and e-libraries. According to the Digital Divide Theory (Norris, 2001), disparities in digital access create inequalities in information access,

education quality and career opportunities. According to how they adopt new technology, people are divided into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1962). Most responders (63%) are considered “laggards” since they have not used digital channels to sell their artwork yet. Merely 14.8% of the population can be categorized as “early adopters” or “early majority,” indicating that they use these platforms often. Perceived complexity, ignorance, or cultural inertia that supports conventional sales techniques like in-person exhibits could be the causes of the adoption lag. This theory is echoed by researchers who emphasize the role of infrastructure in leveling educational and economic playing fields (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2014). In the context of art education, limited digital infrastructure constrains students’ ability to engage with online platforms and understand the digital art marketplace. Consequently, this lack of access hinders their capacity to exploit online channels for selling art, thereby limiting their professional growth. As Petrides and Vila de Brito (2024) highlight, a robust digital presence is essential for artists’ careers, particularly for those in early stages, as it facilitates visibility and engagement. Thus, enhancing digital infrastructure in educational institutions could address this disparity and support more equitable opportunities in the digital art economy.

## 5.2 The Role of Digital Presence in Artistic Merchandise

Another emerging theme is the importance of digital presence as part of an artist’s sales management strategy. Research by Fillis (2015) and Poorsoltan (2012) positions the artist as both an entrepreneur and a brand manager, essential for sustaining visibility and relevance in the digital era. Branding Theory (Keller, 1993) underscores that consistent brand identity is critical to establishing a connection with an audience. In the art world, digital platforms enable artists to promote their personal brands by sharing their work, engaging with followers, and positioning themselves as professionals. Digital presence allows artists to manage their brands and reach audiences directly without the mediation of traditional gatekeepers, as Dawson (2020) notes in the context of Instagram’s role in connecting artists with clients. For students, however, the lack of digital learning facilities could mean that they miss out on learning how to strategically develop and manage their brand online. Without this knowledge, they may struggle to establish a distinctive brand presence, a critical factor for success in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace (Schroeder, 2005).

The integration of digital technologies within the visual arts has become increasingly critical, enabling institutions, galleries, and professional associations to expand their reach, engage audiences, and support artists’ careers more effectively. The advent of digital platforms has transformed the way art is showcased, distributed, and consumed, providing a global reach that traditional galleries often struggle to match. According to Kanellidi (2019), the growing acceptance of digital platforms in visual arts has catalyzed the development of web presences for these institutions, which now serve as essential hubs for networking, marketing, and education. Recent studies emphasize the importance of an online presence for art institutions, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to digital media (McAndrew, 2021). Many galleries and art institutions have since incorporated virtual exhibitions and online catalogs, giving art enthusiasts remote access to collections they might never see in person (Sutton, 2021). This virtual approach democratizes access to art, helping break down geographic and economic barriers that often limit audience engagement (Lee & Lee, 2019). Additionally, online platforms allow these organizations to interact with a younger, tech-savvy audience that prefers virtual engagement (Forbes, 2019).

For institutions and galleries, digital presence is not merely a marketing tool but an educational resource as well. Visual arts institutions increasingly use multimedia content, such as animated pieces, to appeal to diverse audiences and experiment with new artistic formats. Animation, once a niche within visual arts, has gained traction as a respected medium that allows for imaginative storytelling and abstract expression (Griffith et al., 2021). Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube have fueled this trend, showcasing animated works that attract audiences outside of traditional art patrons, thereby broadening the reach and influence of visual arts institutions (Levordashka et al., 2021). The push toward online engagement has also impacted professional associations in visual arts, encouraging them to leverage their websites for industry updates, member showcases, and advocacy for artists’ rights in the digital realm (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020). Associations use these platforms to educate members on emerging practices, such as digital art sales and copyright protection for online content, equipping artists to succeed in a digital-first art world. However, while the transition to digital platforms offers notable benefits, challenges persist. The lack of tactile experience in virtual exhibitions can deter collectors and traditional patrons who value the physical

interaction with art (McAndrew, 2022). Additionally, there are concerns about art theft, unauthorized reproductions, and copyright infringements, particularly for digital works displayed online (Saboo et al., 2016). Thus, while digital technology has opened new avenues for visual art institutions and professionals, careful management is necessary to mitigate the risks associated with the online domain.

### 5.3 Challenges of Selling Sculptural Works Online

A specific challenge that arises in the context of digital platforms is the difficulty of selling heavy, sculptural art online. The logistics of transporting large and heavy artworks involve high costs and complex shipping arrangements, which are not always supported by digital sales platforms. This issue aligns with the Transaction Cost Theory (Coase, 1937), which explains that the cost of transactions (e.g., shipping and handling) can affect market viability. For heavy sculptures, these costs can deter buyers and reduce the overall feasibility of online sales for these works (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014). This theme is particularly relevant for art students who, due to limited digital exposure, might lack awareness of these challenges. Research suggests that artists need to understand the logistics and costs associated with online art sales to effectively navigate this space (Muñiz et al., 2014). For example, alternative strategies like local sales or using specialized platforms could help alleviate some of these challenges. Thus, educating students about logistical and financial considerations is essential for enabling them to make informed decisions when selling large works online.

### 5.4 Emergence of Digital Creators and Changing Artist Identity

The digital era has expanded the concept of an artist to include “digital creators,” who produce and share content across various media, often monetizing their work through social media and other digital platforms. This theme aligns with the Creative Industries Framework (Cunningham, 2002), which highlights the fusion of creativity and commerce in the digital age. The rise of social media has shifted the landscape for artists, enabling them to engage directly with audiences and collectors without traditional intermediaries (McAndrew, 2022). Ostensibly, Levordashka et al (2021) and Chayka (2021) observe that the “creator culture” necessitates frequent content updates to maintain visibility, which can conflict with traditional, slower-paced art practices. For students, understanding this shift is essential to remaining competitive. Exposure to digital tools and strategies in

educational settings could better prepare them for the demands of digital creation and engagement, equipping them with the skills needed to sustain an online presence effectively.

## 6 Conclusion

This research sheds light on the critical factors influencing art students' engagement with digital platforms for both learning and professional development in an increasingly digitized art market. The findings reveal a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges, where digital infrastructure, brand management skills, logistical awareness, and a shift in artist identity play crucial roles. These elements underscore the necessity for educational institutions to not only provide digital learning facilities but also to equip students with the strategic skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the digital art economy. Access to adequate digital infrastructure emerged as a foundational requirement, with a significant portion of students lacking regular access to necessary resources like computer labs, e-libraries, and digital classrooms. This disparity suggests a pressing need for institutions to bridge the digital divide, ensuring all students have the tools required to build a strong digital presence and engage with the online art market effectively. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of digital branding, where art students need to view themselves as entrepreneurs and brand managers to establish a unique identity and attract clientele in competitive online spaces. Logistical challenges in selling certain types of artwork, especially heavy sculptural pieces, also surfaced as a notable barrier, underscoring the importance of educating students on the practical aspects of online art sales. Understanding these logistical and financial considerations empowers students to make informed decisions about the most feasible sales channels for their work. Finally, the emergence of the digital creator identity illustrates a transformative shift in what it means to be an artist today. This evolution reflects the broader trends of the creative industries, where artists are now required to engage audiences regularly, adapt to rapid content production, and leverage social media to sustain visibility.

Summarily, this research projects the need for a more holistic approach in art education that combines technical skills with business acumen and digital literacy. By fostering a comprehensive digital skill set, institutions can better prepare art students to navigate the complexities of the digital marketplace, thereby enabling them to capitalize on new opportunities while mitigating the challenges posed by the online art

world. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, such educational reforms will be essential in supporting the next generation of artists in building resilient, adaptable, and successful careers.

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