



Impact of Social Media on Commercializing Contemporary Art Forms

Mengjin Xu^{1,2*}

¹ Design College, Zhoukou Normal University, Zhoukou, China.

² Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok 10110, Thailand.

* Corresponding Author: xumengjin666@gmail.com

Citation: Xu, M. (2025). Impact of Social Media on Commercializing Contemporary Art Forms. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 25(2), 219-231.

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 26 July 2024

Accepted: 15 August 2024

ABSTRACT

The predominance of social media platforms in recent decades has brought significant and transformative influence in the contemporary art world. Utilizing the technical affordances and innovative features in visual storytelling, artists across different fields are leveraging these platforms to promote and commercialize their artistic expression. These platforms offer specific types of content delivery and interactions to build audience communities shaping their artistic persona and commercial value. This study adopted a case study approach to investigate the social media strategies of commercially successful artists in popular culture. It examined how platforms facilitate artist self-marketing to curate online presence, driving recognition and commercial success. The study concluded that the blend of artistic expression and identity in social media discourse has a cultural impact which in turn influences commercialization. Moreover, their strategic popularity in digital spaces and artistic influence amplify their offline recognition leading to commercialization and brand collaborations.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Social Media, Commercialization, Art Collaborations, Art Marketing

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary hybrid digital environments, social media are emerging as influential spaces for the creation and dissemination of contemporary art by arts, globally. In fact, social media platforms have disrupted the way contemporary art is exhibited and artists are exploiting the affordances of these platforms which is profoundly transforming the way art is created, disseminated, and commodified. The digital transformation has revolutionized the commercialization of art and artists are availing more convenient and advanced digital facilities to create, promote, and sell their artworks (Deng, 2023; Shanken, 2016; Qian, 2022). In 2022 the online art trade reached a mammoth fortune of 10.8 billion USD globally which includes both sales and collectibles (ArtTactic, 2023). The blend of digital art forms and commercialization becomes even more robust in the era of domineering social media platforms. Social media have emerged as potential spaces for contemporary artists for the promotion and commercialization of their art and direct engagement with the audience are reshaping the art market dynamics. Artists from diverse genres are employing marketing strategies that provide greater flexibility in the creation and dissemination of art besides increasing its accessibility. The technical affordances offered by social media platforms are transforming the perspectives on contemporary art expression. The interactivity offers sharing, liking, commenting, and recommending artwork on social media platforms consolidating the role of users as active participants in shaping and validating the cultures of artistic expression. This democratization in the contemporary art world ushered by the blend of art and technology has fostered art accessibility, marketing, and reception in contemporary society. Social media platforms have emerged as spaces for artistic expression with visually driven interfaces and immersive elements offering significant opportunities for artists and art enthusiasts to curate and promote their artwork effectively. The social media platforms *Instagram* and *TikTok* have emerged as the most influential spaces for artists to exhibit and promote tier artistic creativity to a wider audience in the most immersive way possible. *Instagram* having 2.35 billion users has emerged as the most influential platform among artists and art influencers, the reason it is often called a 'virtual art gallery' (Simianer, 2016). As per the Hiscox online art trade report 2023, *Instagram* continues to dominate the art market by 74 percent use among art buyers with 29 per cent of them directly buying the artworks from the platform¹.

¹ <https://www.hiscox.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-04/Hiscox%20online%20art%20trade%20report%202023.pdf>

Due to its aesthetical popularity and prospects for artists it has been already called “the world’s most talked about new art dealer.” (Fleming, 2014). Similarly, in recent years TikTok as a popular social media has been a hub of artistic creativity which allows established and emerging artists to create and share 15-second video shots. Having mammoth 1.7 billion² users globally, TikTok as a popular streaming platform is being used as a powerful commercial and marketing tool as it allows artists to perform their creativity, engage with fans, and create a vast fanbase. In recent times the platform has been effectively used by the artists for self-marketing and nurturing their brand by perusing their professional and socio-political endeavors through art (Gerlieb, 2021). The platform algorithm on TikTok is instrumental in facilitating content discovery for interested audiences who follow established and emerging artists. Both Instagram and TikTok are trending platforms in art marketing and effective promotional tools for contemporary artists to attract potential buyers. These platforms allow self-marketing for the artist community which enables them to curate their online presence and develop personal brand and digital portfolios for enhanced reach and recognition. The current study seeks to investigate the marketing practices and strategies of selected contemporary artists on *Instagram* and *TikTok* and how these strategies are significantly influencing the art market. This research while adopting a case study approach attempts to examine the impact of social media platforms on the commercialization of contemporary art forms. The study will explore the opportunities and avenues offered to artists by social media platforms to commercialize their art.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of commercialization, social media marketing is characterized by connectivity and social engagement which promotes networking and attracts potential customers for brands (Lavoie, 2015). In recent decades, art has been increasingly commercialized by transforming art digital artworks into products that are commodified, promoted, and sold for monetary benefit through existing market transactions (Deng, 2023). Social media platforms are not only significantly shaping the marketing dynamics of the art world but also redefining the mechanism of creation and curation of art (Sokolowsky, 2017). The commercialization of contemporary art has evolved from just an art-marketing affair to becoming an art-market phenomenon in itself with its distinct characteristics and growth patterns (Sidorova, 2019). Among the existing models in the commercialization of the contemporary art market scholars have identified artwork auctions, art exhibitions, online performances, digital rights, and digital art platforms (Deng, 2023). In fact, recent digital advancements and technological innovations like cryptocurrency, artificial intelligence, and blockchain have been identified as key features of the digital art market which are believed to have a potential influence on development in commercialization and structured monetization in contemporary art (Sidorova, 2019). Besides extensive promotion and recognition of art in the cyber world, digital technology has facilitated significant opportunities for artists to get visibility in the global art market and reach out to potential buyers thereby expanding their business prospects (Adam, 2014). Moreover, the digital art market has enabled spaces for interactions between artists and buyers which are materializing into productive and sustained collaborations. Such online art markets allow vendors from across continents to showcase art products allowing for extensive recognition and making it smoothly accessible to potential customers, (Adam, 2014). Art galleries globally are exploiting the techno-social characteristics of various social media platforms in not only promoting and marketing their artworks but it is enabling them to enhance the visitor experience by allowing them to participate in the process (Suess, 2018). The promotion of artworks on social media promotion has augmented artistic independence by overcoming the barriers like dealers, curators, and collectors and this independence has enhanced exposure and recognition among artists and their personal networks (Chayka, 2016). The commercialization of artwork on social media is a conscious choice and the network reach gets inevitably monetized and it’s the audience participation and engagement that compensates for the monetary factor (Chayka, 2016). The increasing popularity of social media platforms and the associated monetary values have transformed the fundamental understanding of e-commerce into social commerce, influencing consumers' decision-making on products (Raiz et al., 2021).

Social media marketing strategies are characterized by online integration and participation of consumers which is significant in developing social communities consequently shaping their purchase behavior (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). The improved communications and interaction through social media platforms have influenced the access and scope for audiences to express preferences for an immense array of media content available. Social media “users of various socio-demographic backgrounds within a given population, corporations, organizations, political movements and the platforms themselves are pursuing a wide range of economic and societal benefits from their use” (Koiranen et al., 2020, p.603). The artistic work on social media platforms by default gets assimilated into large-scale data infrastructure ultimately integrating into the capitalist system as a commodity (Chayka, 2016). Social media platform Instagram is emerging as an influential site for the sale of art as famous art curators, auction houses and independent artists are using it to promote and market their art successfully (Shahzadi, 2020). In the contemporary art world, *Instagram* has emerged as an influential platform for the marketing of art with major players in the market like curators, galleries, and independent visual artists using it to sell their artworks (Shahzadi, 2020). The artists and curators are effectively using user-generated content on *Instagram* to design and plan their exhibitions and the platform has been significant in shaping promotional narratives around the artworks (Kang et al. 2019). Through its highly engaging and aesthetic visual characteristics, *Instagram* has been instrumental in artists' brand recognition and in expanding their influence in the market (Jin & Ryu, 2020). Wallerstein (2018) talked about categories of expression on TikTok like the aesthetic presentation, and artistic ideas that manifest proximity and presence for the audience. The verbal and visual intimacy on TikTok enables the artist to take advantage of the sense of familiarity and closeness while performing their creativity for the audience (Gerlieb, 2021). The existing literature suggests that social media has a multifaceted impact on the commercialization of contemporary art

²

<https://www.businessofapps.com/data/tik-tok-statistics/#:~:text=Source%3A%20TikTok%20Report-,TikTok%20users,increase%20on%20the%20previous%20year.>

and provides significant opportunities for artists to expand their influence and cultivate commercial dividends and collaborations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research posits social media platforms as an effective space for artists to expand their influence and commercialize their art through strategic content dissemination. The existing research at the intersection of digital media and contemporary art is characterized by the commercial impact of the digital art market in the creation and commodification of art in advanced market transaction practices. However, it lacks serious research inquiry in understanding the relevance of social media for commercially successful contemporary artists. There is a dearth of research on how independent artists have adopted strategies to market their art by adopting the technical affordances of these platforms (Shahzadi, 2020). Social media have enabled users to self-promote themselves and leverage consumption goals by availing the technical characteristics and popularity of these platforms. The existing research on the subject is significant in developing a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon in the context of advancing social media environments. In recent times, social media have been influential spaces for celebrities and artists working in different domains to influence their audience and enhance their offline recognition and promotions of their creations and art products. Both the popular Social media platforms Instagram and *TikTok* are known for their power of autonomy in mainstream art as they bypass all the conventional critical and economic constraints of an art market. Most importantly, the phenomenon of discoverability of emerging art forms has consolidated their role in accumulating cultural capital as they enable artists to monetize their creativity by enhancing their popularity and demand.

Considering the evolving social media landscape, this study adopted a case study approach to understand the marketing strategies adopted by highly successful artists in the world. It is imperative to identify the audience engagement strategies adopted by these artists which will help in unraveling their techniques in engaging their social media audience. These strategies will involve understanding the transition from their online interactivity to their offline recognition consequently leading to their commercial collaborations. These inquiries will explore the monetization strategies adopted by these artists in commercializing their art. The study aims to delve into the artist's identity and personality which manifest nuanced motivations and strategies for the promotion of their art. The research objectives adopted for this study are provided below:

RO1: What strategies do artists employ to market their art on social media platforms?

RO2: How does the artist's personality influence his commercial success through social media?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a Case Study research approach to have a comprehensive understanding of how artists are using social media platforms to promote and market their work. Case study approach has proved quite effective in social media research as it has provided substantial knowledge in understanding digital cultures (Li et al., 2020). As an important research method, a case study furnishes rich and detailed data which is quite significant for contextual understanding of socio-culturally and technologically complex issues that are shaping human behavior and decision-making. In order to understand a contemporary phenomenon using several sources of evidence, case studies are crucial in conducting empirical inquiries of a phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2013). In current research, the in-depth examination of the selected cases will involve detailed investigations to gather valuable insights into the artist's involvement, strategies, and content on *TikTok* and *Instagram* for their work. The cases of selected artists will provide a holistic understanding of their social media marketing practices for the promotion and commercialization of their art. The multifaceted analytical approach with a blend of case study and qualitative content analysis methods will be effective in providing a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of commercialization of art on *TikTok* and *Instagram*. The selection criteria for the cases considered their alignment with the research inquiry under this study. From both *TikTok* and *Instagram* artists were identified as cases that ensure diversity of genre, style, and degrees of success on these platforms. *TikTok* artist Lil Nas X and the art influencer Takashi Murakami were selected as two significant cases of commercial successes in contemporary art culture. The two artists are globally known for their popularity and social media have played a phenomenal role in shaping their personality and artistic endeavors.

Qualitative Content Analysis: The in-depth case study approach was complimented by qualitative content analysis of the social media content of the selected artists. The social media profiles of both artists were qualitatively analyzed to get valuable insights into the strategies adopted by them over the years to promote their work and persona. For Lil Nas X, his *TikTok* content was analyzed to understand his social media strategies. For Takashi, his *Instagram* content was qualitatively analyzed to get insights into his strategies to commercialize the platform. This analysis significantly involved understanding the techniques, strategies, and approaches adopted by the artists for the effective marketing of their art by showcasing their work and commercial collaborations. The qualitative analysis of the media content as a research method involves the subjective and thematic interpretation of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Such insights were aimed at dissecting the underlying meaning in their social media posts while promoting the art and provided substantial knowledge into understanding the commodification of art over social media platforms. The posts were analyzed for content strategies that involve commercial factors and user engagement including art styles and themes.

Case 1: Takashi Murakami



Figure 1 : Takashi Murakami Instagram profile with 2.5 million followers³

Takashi Murakami is one of the greatest names in contemporary art (See Figure 1). His works are characterized by colorful humorous styles manifesting a blend of pop culture elements of vibrant anime-inspired traditional Japanese art. Takashi Murakami is known for his legacy of pop art which induced commercial elements in traditional art thereby making the distinction between high and low culture irrelevant. He is best known for his vibrant, colorful, and playful style, which blends traditional Japanese art with contemporary pop culture elements. His culturally significant body of work includes both fine arts like paintings and sculpture and commercial artwork like fashion designs and anime work. Takashi's work has been mainly influenced by aesthetic characteristics of postwar Japanese culture and artistic traditions. Murakami pioneered the popular art movement of 'superflat' which marked the revival of pop art creating innovative artworks as digital art, fashion, product design, and anime. His artistic genius blurred the distinction between fine art and commercial art thereby opening a commercialized Japanese art identity for the international art market. Today Takashi Murakami having 2.5 million followers is a top-selling and most influential artist on *Instagram*. In the contemporary art world, Takashi is globally known for promoting his persona and commercializing his artwork on Instagram which ranges from fashion, lifestyle, and fine arts. Through his robust digital media strategy, he has successfully leveraged *Instagram* as an online portfolio reaching millions of his followers and attracting buyers and inspiring collaborators. Takashi's strategic and persistent exhibition of his artwork on Instagram and popularity in the contemporary art world earned him lucrative commercial collaborations with top brands like *Uniqlo* and *Mentos* including creative partnerships with celebrities like Kanye West (Hills, 2020).

Insights from qualitative analysis

Table 1 : Takashi Murakami Instagram Content Strategies

Strategy	Details	Examples
Storytelling and Narrative style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative style compliments his artwork and has helped him shape his artistic persona. Emotional and Aesthetic Appeal Consistent use of his signature style of art featuring certain characters and motifs like <i>Mr. DOB</i> and flowers in his artwork has shaped his brand Symbolic uses flowers to convey diverse concepts and emotions and this style has been fundamental to his artistic creativity. Use of Postwar Japanese consumer culture themes in his pop art for continuing his artistic legacy 	<p><i>"When the great-uncle speaks and the abominable geometric forms shift around, they glisten, of all things. This, too, I thought, was a ridicule of the absurd Western-style logical expression in Japanese art education. In other words, it is a tragedy that the first step in Japanese art education is in geometric forms"</i></p> <p><i>"I sent a message to Laura Allen, Senior Curator of Japanese Art at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco: "We are in the midst of deadline hell right now."</i></p> <p><i>We only have six days until the paintings get collected for shipping.</i></p> <p><i>@asianartmuseum"</i></p>
Promoting his brand and Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting commercial prospectus in the art world like invitations, participation, projects with curators and galleries, and exhibitions Visual portfolio through Teasers and snippets of artwork to create excitement and curiosity among his followers and potential buyers Informing millions of his followers about the location, dates, and featured artworks of the events. Announcing his limited edition prints and merchandise including information about the places like galleries and websites where such works can be purchased Commercial Integration through his brand <i>murakami.flowers</i> which features collections of his popular artwork Information about new projects, pricing, and hyperlinks to his official online shopping <i>@tonari_no_zingaro</i>. 	<p><i>"My exhibition "Murakami: Monsterized" is now open at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco @asianartmuseum"</i></p> <p><i>"From 3 to 6 pm only!</i></p> <p><i>Our Murakami.Flowers free NFT minting event at Gagosian Le Bourget is happening; distribution will take place only at the venue! Our technical team arrived from the U.S. and Japan in preparation. Dan, Terence, and Robin from NiftyKit"</i></p> <p><i>"We will be releasing Murakami.Flowers trading cards on a certain date in December 2023"</i></p> <p><i>"@tonari_no_zingaro</i></p> <p><i>T_shirts</i></p> <p><i>Satoshi Nakamoto"</i></p>

³ https://www.instagram.com/takashipom/?img_index=

MURAKAMI'S STORYTELLING STRATEGY

In his marketing strategy on Instagram, Takashi Murakami adopts storytelling techniques while posting content about his artwork on *Instagram*. The narrative style compliments his artwork and has helped him shape his artistic brand and persona. Murakami shares notes on ideas and philosophies behind his artistic expression and creative journey which makes the artwork more relatable to buyers and his audience. The content on his Instagram feed frequently shows the journey, efforts, and challenges of creating his artwork which include acknowledging the contribution of people who assist him. Murakami has potentially leveraged Instagram as a platform to develop his signature style of art by persistently featuring certain characters and motifs like *Mr. DOB* and flowers in his art stories (See Figure 2).



Figure 2: A snapshot from Takashi's Instagram featuring his iconic flower style⁴

These characters have significantly shaped his artistic legacy to attract both followers and commercial collaborators. His *Instagram* promotions about exhibitions, invitations, and other art events are often posted in an immersive narrative style. Such stories involve inspiration for participation in a particular event, introducing potential collaborators, and explaining the socio-cultural relevance of the art themes. Such stories are crafted not only to promote such events but also to motivate potential buyers to attend such events and explore his artworks. Murakami's critique of contemporary Japanese art largely comes from his belief that it has been shaped by appropriation of Western trends and his posts often emphasize the Japanese subculture of *Otaku*. Murakami's *Otaku* persona manifested through his art reflects his obsession with art crafts that fundamentally involve anime and manga. Murakami's representation of otaku culture as a contemporary Japanese identity has significantly shaped his artistic personality. His storytelling strongly compliments his artwork on *Instagram* as it has helped him to establish a deeper engagement with his followers. This craft has earned him recognition in popular culture and significantly commercialized his art through sales and collaborations. As a part of his iconic style Murakami symbolically uses flowers to convey diverse concepts and emotions and this style has been fundamental to his artistic creativity. His iconic *Superflat* style of smiling flowers and vibrant use of colors established him at the top of commercial pop art. For Murakami, the smiling flowers as an iconic style in his artwork manifest the suppressed emotions and shared trauma with the postwar Japanese generations. Over the decades, the artist has narrated this embedded trauma in Japanese society in a joyful manner which has become iconic to his popular artistic expression in the contemporary art world. Murakami's Instagram feeds frequently feature behind the scene content that showcases the creative process, techniques, and efforts in making artworks in his studio thereby providing deeper insights about understanding the worth of his art.

COMMERCIALIZING INSTAGRAM TO ADVERTISE HIS ARTWORK

As an *Instagram* art influencer, Murakami has potentially used the platform to not only announce his new art releases but also advertise his commercial collaborations. Such direct promotions on his Instagram have consolidated commercial value to his artistic endeavors. From Nike x RTFKT Collab to Perrier, Takashi Murakami has monetized on these collaborations by amplifying his artistic persona to the next level of commercialization in the art world. The art icon persistently shares his new art collaborations and markets them by directing his audience to his official online store *Tonari no Zingaro*⁵. Besides this, Murakami often announces his limited edition prints and merchandise on his Instagram account including information about the places like galleries and websites where such works can be purchased. Such marketing strategies have helped him commercialize his art by generating demand and interest among his followers. In April 2023, the Takashi Murakami custom-designed sneakers for a joint NFT collaboration between *RTFKT* and *Nike Air Force 1* (See Figure 3). The sneakers adorned with Murakami iconic art motifs were released in two limited editions, '*Murakami Drip*' and '*Murakami DNA*' (Hernandez, 2023).

⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cr4eDFSPCOB>

⁵ https://www.instagram.com/tonari_no_zingaro/?hl=e

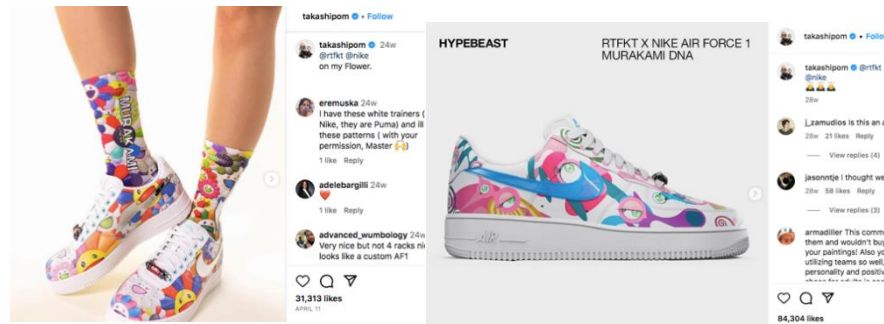


Figure 3: Takashi advertising his custom designed sneakers for RTFKT and Nike Air Force 1 on his Instagram ⁶⁷

Takashi Murakami went on collaborating with Perrier on Limited Edition Bottles where he featured his signature smiling flowers with Kaikai and Kiki characters (See Figure 4).



Figure 4: Takashi Murakami advertising for Perrier on Limited Edition Bottles where he featured his signature smiling flowers ⁸

The art icon designed a pair of sneakers TZ BS-06s which he made available on his official online store Tonari no Zingaro for 611 USD (See Figure 5) .

"In the past I have collaborated with brands such as Issey Miyake, Louis Vuitton, and Vans at their requests and designed the surface patterns, packages, and wrappings, but I was never really involved in developing any products. This time, I truly got [to] do everything from scratch.", he wrote on Instagram⁹



Figure 5: Takashi Murakami promoting his self-manufactured TZ BS-06s sneakers on his Instagram ¹⁰

MARKETING COLLABORATIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

Takashi Murakami and his artistic influence have earned him numerous collaborations and partnerships with influential brands and A-list celebrities (See Figure 6). In 2019, Takashi Murakami collaborated with American musician Pharrell Williams for the sculpture *The Simple Things* a deal of whooping US\$2.6m-3.8m (Hills, 2020). Takashi Murakami collaborated with fashion kings like Louis Vuitton and Vogue. In 2020, Japanese casual wear brand *Uniqlo* teamed with Takashi Murakami and Grammy winner Billie Eilish for a limited-edition T-shirt. Previously Takashi collaborated with Billie Eilish on the music video *"you should see me in a crown"* which was auctioned by the famous art enterprise *Christie* in Hong Kong (lifestyle.com, 2020). In 2020, the teaser clip *Kids See Ghosts* by Kanye West and Kid Cudi was directed by Murakami (Alvarez, 2020). Such collaborations and subsequent promotions have significantly helped him in marketing his art and increased demand for exclusive

⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cq3mP5KyuvJ>

⁷ <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cp10oNULG5i>

⁸ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CG3fIMQlmYf>

⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/B1gxeUWl2tw>

¹⁰ https://www.instagram.com/p/CYZ1lT4gkXg/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=loading&img_index=

artworks. These art promotions in the form of teasers and snippets of work on *Instagram* as a visual portfolio have been useful in creating excitement and curiosity among his followers and potential buyers.

*“As I start to approach the end of my life, I have been given some opportunities to do the exhibitions that I strongly believe in and wish to do. This time, I am having a two-person exhibition at an antique gallery called Otsuka Fine Art @otsuka_fineart with my collaborator and partner-in-crime in ceramic art, Shin Murata @muratashinwolf” (Murakami wrote on Instagram)*¹¹



Figure 6: Murakami promoting his commercial collaborations on Instagram¹²

Such anticipations about upcoming events and collaborations allow him keep his audience hooked and invoke sense of opportunity for art buyers and curators. Moreover, Murakami lends potential marketing services to art exhibitors and galleries by using his social media platform for informing millions of his followers about the location, dates, and featured artworks of the events. Takashi has overwhelmingly promoted these collaborations on his Instagram which has been significant in enhancing his fame and commercial prospectus in the art world.

Case study 2 : Lil Nas X

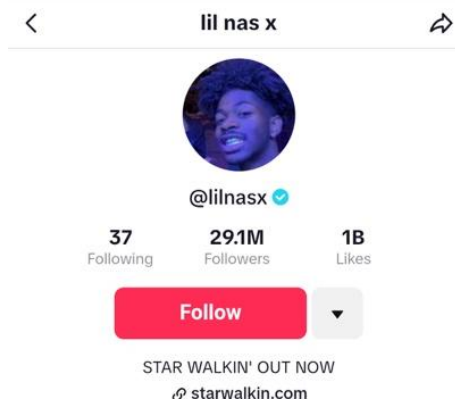


Figure 7: Lil Nas's TikTok profile, 29.1 million followers¹³

Lil Nas X born Montero Lamar Hill is an American music artist who rose to become a global musical sensation by strategically leveraging the popularity of social media platforms. The artist has 29.1 million followers on *TikTok* and 7.9 followers on *Twitter*¹⁴ earned global fame by harnessing the power of these platforms which were phenomenal in shaping his persona and cultivating a devoted fan base (See Figure 7). Lil Nas X is a highly commercialized artist in contemporary popular culture and he amplified his musical fame and identity by innovative and engaging tactics on social media platforms that led to his commercial exploits as a social media-driven celebrity. Lil Nas X released his first song his country rap single *"Old Town Road"* on the social media site *TikTok* which instantly became a sensation and cornerstone for his following commercial boom. The song went viral on *TikTok* breakout hit which gained traction topping US Billboard Hot 100 for 19 weeks, becoming the longest-running no 1 song on the chart¹⁵. Lil Nas X is a typical case of artistic commercial success and strategic marketing by leveraging social media platforms. His social media success led to commercial collaborations which were phenomenal in shaping his career, consequently making him win prestigious recognition and accolades including two Grammy Awards, five Billboard Music Awards, and inclusion Songwriters Hall of Fame¹⁶. The first released song *"Old Town Road"* after viral outbreak is reported to have exclusively earned him a mammoth \$14 million pretax as reported by *Forbes* (Bonner, 2023).

¹¹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CrRT996SVtj>

¹² https://www.instagram.com/p/Co_Vyyvveso

¹³ <https://www.tiktok.com/@lilnasx?lang=en>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/LilNas>

¹⁵ <https://www.billboard.com/pro/lil-nas-x-old-town-road-number-one-hot-100-19-weeks>

¹⁶ https://www.wikiwand.com/en/List_of_awards_and_nominations_received_by_Lil_Nas_X

Table 2: Lil Nas X Content strategies on TikTok:

Strategy	Details	Examples
Viral marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaser surprises to generate excitement • Provocative content to generate a reaction • Cryptic messages to create curiosity • Innovative experiments to make content viral 	Announcing fake pregnancy using prosthetic belly () Calling for challenges among TikTokers like <i>#YeehawChallenge</i> ¹⁷ <i>#PoleDanceToHell</i> ¹⁸
Controversies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting reaction by cashing on controversies • Stunts & pranks to attract public attention • Sparking discussion by generating support and disapproval 	Lil Nas surprised the audience by releasing the song “Industry Baby” on TikTok Adopting bold sexualized screenplay in the controversial song <i>Montero (Call Me By Your Name)</i>
Self-branding & Queer identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courageous self-expression of his queer identity • Making queer aesthetics central to his content • Openly sharing his sexual identity for authenticity and relatability • Unapologetic expression to challenge stereotypes 	Persistently adoring his queer personality by using colors, props, clothes, and subliminal messages to promote and represent queerness
Commercial Integration through brand Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic promotion of collaborations with other artists, brands, and influencers • Collaborations for increased popularity and fanbase • Collaborations to increase the commercial value of his brand 	The artist promoting his collaborations with brands for shows, music, and live-streaming

Viral marketing

Lil Nas X gained widespread popularity by harnessing the power of viral marketing across social media platforms. His song “*Old Town Road*” gained traction on *TikTok* where thousands of users used the captivating chorus of the song to create videos. For the song Lil Nas X adopted innovative and immersive techniques in asking his audience on social media to provide lyric ideas for his memes. Lil Nas’s provocative approach involves innovative experiments to release content like teaser surprises, cryptic messages, and shockers which trigger a lot of anticipation and discussion on social media platforms. The viral tactics involve cross-platform promotions where the artist customizes his content and strategies for each social media as per the diversity within the audience. Lil Nas X adhered to sensationless discourse by leveraging the power of meme culture by creating memes and engaging in meme trends viral threads, and engagement baits with the followers. Such meme trends have been consistent in his content and quite significant in keeping his persona and music circulated across social media platforms.

In his content, the marketing strategies involve the effective use of controversies and stunts to catch user attention and remain trending on social media platforms. Lil Nas X released his controversial music video “*Montero (Call Me By Your Name)*” which led to intense criticism, praise, and discussion on social media. The music video which featured bold queer themes sparked online debate on freedom of expression in sexuality and LGBTQ+ representation. In the buildup for the booming release of his songs, Lil Nas X adopted a well-executed marketing strategy to increase his popularity and fan base. Lil Nas X released his song “Industry Baby” on *TikTok* (with 26 K views in two minutes)(See Figure 8). Lil Nas adopted robust viral marketing strategies to generate a huge response on TikTok which significantly added to his popularity in pop art. He initiated a challenge on the *TikTok* *#PoleDanceToHell*. He addressed his followers on *TikTok*:

“Post a video of you pole dancing to *Montero (Call Me By Your Name)* using the hashtag *#PoleDanceToHell* for a chance to

¹⁷ <https://www.popbuzz.com/internet/viral/i-got-the-horses-in-the-back-memes>

¹⁸ <https://toofab.com/2021/03/31/lil-nas-x-pole-dancing-to-hell-challenge-tiktok-10k>

win 10,000 dollars."¹⁹

The challenge got an intense response on social media platforms with people, including celebrities taking up the challenge.

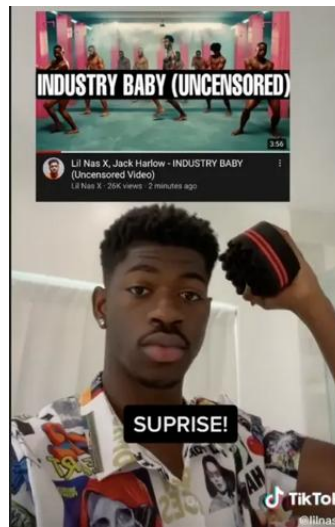


Figure 8: Lil Nas surprised the audience by releasing the song “Industry Baby” on TikTok²⁰

The teasers and previews projected a strategic controversial imagery from the much-anticipated music video which included religious and satanic symbolism. Such provocative tactics in the form of memes, and GIFs around the song sparked intense discussions consequently leading to public attention and increased audience engagement. In reaction, several high-profile public figures and Conservative politicians criticized Lil Nas X as an evil” musician who is “destroying society.” this in turn helped the artist to generate more reactive content and gain intense public attention and enormous social media following (Street, 2021).

AUTHENTIC SELF-EXPRESSION THROUGH BLACK QUEER REPRESENTATION

Lil Nas X through his strategic social media marketing, maintained a recognizable persona with his distinctive style and imagery which is mainly manifested through his courageous self-expression. Following the release of *Montero*, Lil Nas X consolidated his queer identity on social media (See Figure 9). In his content, he has consistently advocated freedom of expression around sexuality and promoted LGBTQ+ identity. His consistency in embracing his sexual identity and assimilating the same in his social media discourse positioned him as an authentic storyteller. In June 2019, Lil Nas X celebrated his queer identity when he openly shared his sexual identity as a gay on Twitter in 2019²¹. This move played a pivotal role in establishing him as an authentic popular artist as his unapologetic expression contributed to the larger debates on LGBTQ+ visibility and queer identity on social media



Figure 9: Lil Nas X has used his queer persona to establish his personality in pop culture²²

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/i/status/137706134772525466>

²⁰ <https://www.tiktok.com/@lilnasx/video/699001402606757811>

²¹ <https://twitter.com/LilNasX/status/114542881240406835>

²² <https://www.tiktok.com/@lilnasx?lang=en>

His Montero album passionately celebrated the notion of a 'gay agenda'. The music video whose teaser was released in July 2020 sparked a massive debate on social media platforms. The video depicted biblical imagery of heaven, hell, and Satan with explicit bold queer desires. The narrative in the video manifested a challenge to religious disapproval of queer desires. His TikTok often reinterprets theological stories on sexuality through a queer lens, reinforcing his impact in contemporary debates on the subject. His bold revelations excited his fans and there was an overwhelming response to him, followers thanking him for being truthful and open about his identity and inspiring people like him to be comfortable in revealing who they are. Such authenticity and relatability through his bold queer content had a great influence on shaping his way to social media stardom. His queer representation resonated among several people in his fan base, consolidating him as a queer figurehead. His social media content fundamentally adopted queer aesthetics challenging stereotypes and sparked social media conversations on third-gender representation in popular culture and society at large.

LEVERAGING ONLINE POPULARITY FOR COMMERCIAL COLLABORATIONS

One of the major determinants of Lil Nas X's marketing genius on social media has been his strategic collaborations with other artists, brands, and influencers. While commercializing his brand, Lil Nas leveraged these collaborations to expand his influence and popularity by tapping into the fan base of his partners. After the phenomenal success of his first song "Old Town Road" on social media in 2019, Lil Nas X signed American record label, *Columbia Records* for distribution rights of the song. Subsequently, *Columbia Records* released the remix version of the song featuring Lil Nas X and American country singer Billy Ray Cyrus in 2019 (Arnold, 2019). This collaboration amplified the further success of the song as more artists like Mason Ramsey, Electronic Dance Music Artist Diplo, Korean Rapper RM, and rapper Young Thug partnered with Lil Nas to create remixes of the song. His online influence and marketing potential materialized into some significant offline collaborations as well. In his promotional campaigns, Lil Nas entered into some brand partnerships that significantly involved collaborating with New York-based art collective MSCHF. He in collaboration with MSCHF released a pair of "Satan shoes" seen in his "Montero" music video (South China Morning Post, 2021). The shoe had an inverted cross on it and contained one drop of real human blood. This partnership generated buzz across social media and the special edition of 666 pairs was reported to be sold out in less than a minute. These strategic marketing partnerships generated excitement and discussions among his online followers thereby adding to his popularity and brand value.

CONCLUSIONS

In the realm of social media marketing, the commercialization in contemporary art world is an emerging and multifaceted phenomenon. The research inquiries set under this study aimed to investigate social media in relation to commercialization in the contemporary art world. Based on the two case studies, the study found that both artists have achieved substantial commercial success through the innovative use of platforms to promote their eccentric and rebellious pop art. The study found that artistic expression and identity have a cultural impact and artists leverage social media this impact to commercialize their art. Besides this, the strategic social media popularity and artistic influence have amplified their offline recognition as evident from both artists collaborating with leading brands for various products. Towards understanding the content strategies of contemporary artists in relation to the increased commercialization of their art, two major conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the study concludes that artists are effectively and strategically using social media platforms to resonate their artistic expressions and storytelling by exploiting the existing socio-cultural fault lines in society. Secondly, such experiments through the bold usage of cultural realities that challenge the elitism and superiority of traditional notions of art expression are eliminating the fine line between artistic work and commercialization. These major conclusions are further elaborated below.

In the context of social media, the artist and their artistic value in the market significantly depends on their artistic expressions and how they resonate with their wide and heterogeneous audience. This resonance is manifested by the artist's tendency to make his expression relatable and relevant by embedding shared emotions and experiences. As evident from the insights from the two cases, the artist while recognizing the existing socio-cultural and political fault lines in contemporary society are positioning their art on these platforms to align with such issues and trigger critical debates and dialogue. Such strategies have greatly helped the artists to maintain their artistic relevance in critical socio-cultural debates in society, thereby enhancing their value in the art market. For contemporary pop artists, beyond the intrinsic commercial value of art performances and products, it is their socio-cultural and contextual references which are leveraged for commodifying their art. The persistence in adopting personalized storytelling techniques on platforms which involve visual art aesthetics and stories behind their art has enabled them to blend a deeper meaning to their artistic creativity and offered them a deeper engagement with their audience (Giles, 2017; Wang & Picone, 2023). The technical affordances of these platforms and innovative features in visual storytelling are enabling these artists to promote and commodify their art. This interactivity and narrativity in artistic expression have largely contributed to crafting their artistic persona. The insights from the cases substantiate the fact that the commercialization of contemporary art has disrupted the conventional homogeneity in artistic practices as identified by Li (2020) and Rodner et al. (2020). Social media platforms have enabled these artists to employ diversified practices like styles, formats and innovative genres to create, communicate and commodify their art. Besides exhibiting extraordinary proficiency in leveraging social media platforms, artists are exploiting highly effective skills of crafting content with multimedia elements for impactful dissemination of their content.

The social media marketing of art has pushed the boundaries of conventional artistic norms and the platforms are redefining the value of artistic expression in popular culture. This study found that social media have enabled these contemporary artists to challenge the conventional norms and traditional notions of artistic expression being associated with elitism and superiority.

These artists who mostly confront the hierarchical structures of the art world (Sugita et al., 2021), with the help of social media are creating influential spaces for themselves by providing an alternative against hegemonic artistic norms. As substantiated by this study critique of traditional artistic practices is often manifested by confronting hegemonic hierarchies, disrupting conventions and sparking debates on cultural appropriation and stereotypes related to marginalized social groups (Rathna, 2023). While challenging traditional norms and pushing the boundaries, these artists at the same time are making their art commercially viable in the contemporary art market. This indicates that the phenomenon of art commercialization by these pop artists is eliminating the fine line between art and commerce. Such emerging practices are reducing the distinction between 'high art' and 'commercial art' which is influencing the public perception of art as evident from the huge fan base and appreciation around these artists. Moreover, another major implication of the social media marketing of art has been the growing trend of inclusivity in both art creation and expression. These art marketing practices provide democratized access to art by bypassing gatekeeping and directly reaching out to a broader audience and allowing people to consume, share, and comment on their artwork. Besides this, by making artistic interventions in the contentious socio-cultural issues in the society these artists and their art are democratizing the art world.

REFERENCES

- Adam, M. G. (2014). *Big bucks: The explosion of the art market in the 21st century*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Alvarez, L. (2020, June 27). Kid Cudi And Kanye West Unveil 'Kids See Ghosts' Animated Show Teaser. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurenalvarez/2020/06/27/kid-cudi-and-kanye-west-unveil-kids-see-ghosts-animated-show-teaser/>
- ArtTactic (2023) Hiscox online art trade report. Available at <https://www.hiscox.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-04/Hiscox%20online%20art%20trade%20report%202023.pdf>
- Chayka, K. (2016). Art in the Corporatized Sphere: The Impact of Commercial Social Media on Online Artistic Practice. *A Companion to Digital Art*, 413-425.
- Deng, S. (2023). Market and Commercialisation of Digital Media Art. *Frontiers in Business, Economics and Management*, 10(2), 317-319.
- Fleming, O. (2014, May 13). Social media and the art world: buying and selling art on Instagram — Vogue. *Vogue*. <https://www.vogue.com/article/buying-and-selling-art-on-instagram>
- Gerlieb, A. (2021, July). TikTok as a new player in the contemporary arts market: A study with special consideration of feminist artists and a new generation of art collectors. In *Arts* (Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 52). MDPI.
- Giles, D. C. (2017). How do fan and celebrity identities become established on Twitter? A study of 'social media natives' and their followers. *Celebrity studies*, 8(3), 445-460.
- Go, E., & You, K. H. (2016). But not all social media are the same: Analyzing organizations' social media usage patterns. *Telematics and Informatics*, 33(1), 176-186.
- Hernandez, J. (2023). Takashi Murakami's First Nike Collaboration, Two RTFKT x Air Force 1s, Forges On April 24. *Sneaker News*. <https://sneakernews.com/2023/04/10/murakami-rtfkt-nike-air-force-1-april-2023/>
- Hills, M. C. (2020, May 24). From Drake to Billie Eilish, why celebrities are obsessed with artist Takashi Murakami | London Evening Standard. *Evening Standard*. <https://www.standard.co.uk/insider/living/takashi-murakami-kanye-west-billie-eilish-drake-a4446351.html>
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.
- Huang, Z., & Benyoucef, M. (2013). From e-commerce to social commerce: A close look at design features. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 12(4), 246-259.
- Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2021). The commercialization of social media stars: a literature review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of social media influencers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 327-375.
- Jin, S. V., & Ryu, E. (2020). Instagram fashionistas, luxury visual image strategies and vanity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 29(3), 355-368.
- Kang, X., Chen, W., & Kang, J. (2019, December). Art in the age of social media: Interaction behavior analysis of Instagram art accounts. In *Informatics* (Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 52). MDPI.
- Koiranen, I., Keipi, T., Koivula, A., & Räsänen, P. (2020). Changing patterns of social media use? A population-level study of Finland. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 19, 603-617.
- Lavoie, K. A. (2015). Instagram and Branding: A Case Study of "Dunkin'Donuts". *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 6(2).
- Li, L., Zhang, Q., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Wang, T., Gao, T. L., ... & Wang, F. Y. (2020). Characterizing the propagation of situational information in social media during covid-19 epidemic: A case study on weibo. *IEEE Transactions on computational social systems*, 7(2), 556-562.
- Li, H. (2020). *Tensions and Transformations: Mapping the intersection between contemporary art and the network society*. Researchgate.
- Lifestyle.com (2020, May 19). Billie Eilish and Takashi Murakami collaborate for a new Uniqlo collection. *Lifestyle Asia Bangkok*. <https://www.lifestyleasia.com/bk/style/fashion/billie-eilish-and-takashi-murakami-uniqlo/>
- Napoli, P.M.: *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences*. Columbia University Press, New York (2011)
- Simianer, P (2016) How Social Media is Changing Our Art Experience. (n.d.). *Artwork Archive*. Available at <https://www.artworkarchive.com/blog/how-social-media-is-changing-our-art-experience>
- Sugita, I. W., Setini, M., & Anshori, Y. (2021). Counter hegemony of cultural art innovation against art in digital media. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 7(2), 147.

- Rathna, D. (2023). Art and Counterculture: Shaping Identity Through Expression and Engagement. *Art and Society*, 2(4), 40-48.
- Riaz, M. U., Guang, L. X., Zafar, M., Shahzad, F., Shahbaz, M., & Lateef, M. (2021). Consumers' purchase intention and decision-making process through social networking sites: a social commerce construct. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 40(1), 99-115.
- Rodner, V., Roulet, T. J., Kerrigan, F., & Vom Lehn, D. (2020). Making space for art: A spatial perspective of disruptive and defensive institutional work in Venezuela's art world. *Academy of management journal*, 63(4), 1054-1081.
- Shahzadi, N. (2020). Instagram: A digital marketplace for independent visual artists (Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology).
- Sidorova, E. (2019, July). The cyber turn of the contemporary art market. In *Arts* (Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 84). MDPI.
- Sokolowsky, J. Art in the Instagram Age: How Social Media Is Shaping Art and How You Experience It. 2017. Available online: <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/visual-arts/art-in-the-instagram-age-how-social-media-is-shaping-art-and-how-you-experience-it/> (accessed on 29 October 2019).
- Suess, A. (2018). Instagram and art gallery visitors: Aesthetic experience, space, sharing and implications for educators. *Australian Art Education*, 39(1), 107-122.
- Wang, X., & Picone, I. (2023). The art of attracting attention: a process model of Chinese toubu vloggers' strategies to create online identities and self-brands. *Celebrity Studies*, 14(3), 333-349.
- Wallerstein, W (2018) Circumventing the White Cube: Digital Curatorial Practices in Contemporary Media Landscapes. Available online: <https://anti-materia.org/circumventing-the-white-cube> (accessed on 20 September 2023)
- Yin, R. K. (2014). Case study research: Designs and methods (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.